Al-Mīzān

An Exegesis of the Qur'an

ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī

Translated by: Alexander Khalili

Edited by: Amina Inloes

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In the Name of Allah,
the Beneficent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds;
the Beneficent, the Merciful;
the Master of the Day of Judgment;
Thee only we serve, and to Thee alone we beseech
for help;
Guide us in the straight path;
The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed
favors,not of those against whom Thou art
wrathful, nor of those who are astray.

O' Allah! send Your blessings to the head of
Your messengers and the last of
Your prophets,
Muḥammad and his pure and cleansed progeny.
Also send Your blessings to all Your
prophets and envoys.

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Arabic Transliteration Key

Arabic Letters	Transliteration	Arabic Letters	Transliteration
ا	ā	ع	ʿ
ب	b	غ	gh
ت	t	ف	f
ث	th	ق	q
ج	j	ك	k
ح	ḥ	ل	l
خ	kh	م	m
د	d	ن	n
ذ	dh	ه	h
ر	r	و	w/ū
ز	z	ى	y/ī
س	s	ء	ʾ
ش	sh	ة	-
ص	ṣ	ـَ	a
ض	ḍ	ـَ	i
ط	ṭ	ـُ	u
ظ	ẓ		

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Publisher's Note

In an effort to make the text more accessible to English-speaking readers, the editors have chosen to use English names for the prophets and figures (as listed below but not limited to) and to use Anglicized terms that now appear in English dictionaries.

Ādam	Adam	Mūsā	Moses
David	David	Sulaymān	Solomon
Aaron	Aaron	Shuʿayb	Jethro
Ibrāhīm	Abraham	Yaʿqūb	Jacob
ʿĪsā	Jesus	ʾAyyūb	Job
Isḥāq	Isaac	Yūshaʿ	Joshua
Ismāʿīl	Ishmael	Joseph	Joseph
Jibrāʾīl	Gabriel	Zakariyyā	Zachariah
Mary	Mary	ʿUzayr	Ezra

Arabic terms and names have been transliterated according to the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*).

For ease of reading, glyphs and traditional honorifics such as "peace be upon him" or (s.a.w.) which are commonly used as a gesture of respect after the name of the Prophet Muhammad, the Imāms, or other sacred figures have been omitted from this text. No disrespect is intended, and may God's peace and blessings be upon them all!

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Foreword

This volume of *Tafsīr al-Mīzān* comprises of the *tafsīr* of five complete chapters, namely, Sūrah Muḥammad (47), Sūrah al-Fatḥ (48), Sūrah al-Ḥujarāt (49), Sūrah Qaf (50) and Sūrah al-Dhāriyāt (51). The first three sūrahs were revealed in Medina and the other two, in Mecca.

Sūrah Muḥammad (47) draws a beautiful comparison between the faithful and the faithless in their qualities and deeds in this life and the end result in the hereafter. The sūrah also discusses the condition of the hypocrites and those who disbelieve after believing. It concludes with a warning to the believers not to incline to the faithless and end up becoming like them. Otherwise, their works will fail. The admonishment comes as a mixture of encouragement and warning.

The verses of Sūrah al-Fatḥ (48) clearly relate and apply to the account of the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah which took place in the seventh year of the *Hijrah*. The main aim of this sūrah is to expound God's favor upon His Messenger through the clear victory, and upon the faithful who accompanied him in the journey to Ḥudaybiyyah. The sūrah concludes by describing the Prophet and those with him with the description given for them in the Torah and Injīl and gives a beautiful promise of divine reward to those of them who are faithful and do righteous deeds.

Sūrah al-Ḥujarāt (49) discusses in detail, the aspects of Islam's teachings that are essential for providing a happy life for the individual and supporting a good and virtuous social order. These teachings include the proper etiquette for a servant to observe with God and with His Messenger, how the human being interacts with others of his kind in the context of communal life; and those which relate to the superiority of individuals within that community, which is one of the most important aspects of how civil society is organized. The sūrah concludes by alluding to the essence of faith and submission.

Sūrah Qaf (50) talks about the prophetic mission and discusses the warning it contains of the Resurrection. The sūrah also calls attention to God's knowledge and power by mentioning His governance, as demonstrated by His creation of the universe and the blessings of sustenance He provides for His servants. Next, it discusses the condition of the human

being from the very beginning of his creation and his journey back to Him to receive judgment and reward according to his deeds. The main focus of the sūrah is Resurrection and one of its most profound verses read:

> *You were certainly oblivious of this. We have removed your veil from you, and so your sight is acute today* (50:22).

Finally, the main discussion in Sūrah al-Dhāriyāt (51) is about Resurrection or the Day of recompense. The discussion sometimes turns to arguments for the Resurrection for which God employs evidence for Divine Unity in the heavens, the earth, and souls, as well as the punishments God inflicted on previous nations after inviting them to believe in Divine Unity and their rejection of His messengers. One of its finest verses is:

> *I did not create the jinn and the humans except that they may worship Me* (51:56).

We are grateful to all those who were involved in bringing this volume to fruition especially the translator, Alexander Khalili, and our chief editor, Dr. Amina Inloes. Alexander once again renders a meticulous and fluid translation from the Arabic text and we are confident that the readers will enjoy and benefit from reading this volume.

Tawheed Institute Australia Ltd
October, 2021

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About the Author

The late Islamic scholar, thinker, and philosopher, ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī came from the celebrated Ṭabāṭabāʾī family of Tabriz. For the last three centuries, this family has produced generation after generation of renowned religious scholars in Azerbaijan (Iran). They are descendants of the second Imām, al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī (peace be on both of them). The clan is also referred to with the title, al-Qāḍī.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad b. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī. ʿAllāmah was born in Tabriz on 29 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 1321/17 March 1904. His father died in 1330 (1912). The orphaned child grew up in Tabriz, and after completing his religious education there, around 1341 (1923), he went to Najaf (Iraq), the most important center of Shia religious learning.

In Najaf, he began his higher studies with such illustrious scholars as Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nāʾīnī al-Gharawī (1277–1355/1860 or 1861–1936), the son of Shaykh al-Islām ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, and Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī (1296–1361/1878–1942), the son of al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Ḥasan, Muʿīn al-Tujjār.

These two were among the most prominent scholars in the Shia world. They were among the most prominent scholars not only in the fields of Shia jurisprudence and principles of jurisprudence, but in all Islamic subjects. Their opinions and theories are still followed today. Each founded his own school of thought and trained thousands of Shia scholars and jurists; and all the *marājiʿ al-taqlīd*[1] of the Shia world, to this day, are their students. Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī was a philosopher, unsurpassed in his time; a man of literature; and a poet in Arabic and Persian; he was a genius whose achievements made others look up to him as their ideal. Shaykh Nāʾīnī, with his bold opinions and decrees in the political and social life of the Muslim *umma*, has carved for himself a niche in history.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was much influenced by these two teachers,

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1 The highest authorities of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) whose rulings are followed by others.

particularly by al-Iṣfahānī, in the development of his thought and knowledge. A third influence was that of al-Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim Jaʿfar Khwānsārī (1313– 80/1895 or 1896–1961), the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Mūsāwī, known as "the mathematician." ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was proud to have studied mathematics with him, and also wrote a book on higher mathematics, in which he applied some special theories of his teacher.

ʿAllāmah studied philosophy and metaphysics from al-Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Ḥusaynī Bādkūbahʾī; the latter was a student of al-Sayyid Riḍā, who studied with al-Sayyid Mūsā, a well-known teacher of philosophy and related subjects. In the fields of ethics and spirituality, ʿAllāmah received his training from his relatives, al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Qāḍī (1285–1366/1869–1947), a well-known scholar who established a school of spiritual and ethical training which still flourishes today.

All these influences combined to create in ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī a well-balanced academic and spiritual personality. He was a well-respected authority on religious subjects of jurisprudence and its fundamentals; a philosopher of independent views and new theories; and an inspired model of ethical and spiritual perfection. He not only taught morality, but also lived it. Yet it is also correct to state that his scholarship was overshadowed by his fame and prestige as a philosopher and a spiritual man.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī returned to Tabriz in 1353/1934, where he was welcomed as a religious scholar. There he spent his time teaching higher philosophy to willing disciples—but it was a small place for his talents. In 1364/1945 he migrated to Qum, the most important center of religious education in Iran. In Qum, he remained engaged in imparting the knowledge of ethics, philosophy, and the exegesis of the Qurʾan to those students who had already attained a high level of erudition. There he remained until his death on Sunday, 18 Muḥarram 1402/15 November 1981. May God bestow His mercy on him. Amen.

Many religious leaders of the present generation were and are among his students and disciples, the most famous being the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī (1338–99/1920–79).

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī's fame rests on his academic works—the most important being his great exegesis of the Qurʾan, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān.* It is said to be the foundation stone of the academic prestige which ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was accorded in the Muslim world.

Among his other works is *Uṣūl-i falsafah va ravish-i riʾalism* [Practical and Philosophical Principles of Realism]. This book is a comparative

study of Islamic philosophy and various modern anti-Islamic schools of thoughts, especially Marxism. His disciple, the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, annotated this work, thus making it easily accessible to the average man.

A third book, *Shiʿa dār Islām*, was first published in Persian; later it was published in English with the title, *Shiʾite Islam.* The ʿAllāmah wrote this book on the request of Professor Kenneth Morgan of Colgate University, to introduce Shiism to the West.

However, it is his *tafsīr, al-Mīzān* (published in 20 volumes in Arabic) which presents the true picture of the author's academic style and his way of thinking. In the preface to volume 1, the author outlines his plan, to explain the Qurʾan with the help of the Qurʾan itself. This he faithfully does, all the way through to the end of the *tafsīr*.

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Chapter 47

Sūrah Muḥammad

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Verses 1-6

بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

This sūrah describes the abhorrent qualities and evil deeds that distinguish the faithless and at the same time describes the pleasant qualities and good deeds of the faithful. Then it mentions the blessings and nobility that will result as a consequence of the latter, contrasting these with the suffering and humiliation of the former. In short, this sūrah draws a comparison between the two groups in their qualities and deeds in this world and the results of these in the hereafter. It also contains some verses dealing with the rules of warfare.

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Based on the tone of the verses, we can reliably say that this is a Medinan sūrah.

الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَصَدُّوا عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَضَلَّ أَعْمَالَهُمْ ﴿١﴾

(47:1) ***Those who are faithless and bar from the way of God—He has made their works go astray.***

Some commentators have said to *bar from* means to turn aside from *the way of God*, which is Islam. Others have said it means to obstruct, meaning to prevent people from believing in what the Prophet was inviting them to, which was the religion of Divine Unity.

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The second of these two explanations is more appropriate to the context provided by the verses that follow, especially considering that these enjoin the faithful to fight and capture them and others.

Those who are faithless refers to the faithless of Mecca and those who follow them in their faithlessness; they would prevent people from believing in the Prophet and persecute them, also barring them from entering the Holy Sanctuary.

He has made their works go astray means that He has made them miss the mark; they will not achieve what they intended through them. This includes their efforts to wipe out the truth and preserve falsehood. The meaning of this statement is repeated throughout the Qur'an, such as when God says: *God does not guide the faithless lot* (2:264). And God has promised to preserve the truth and eradicate falsehood, for example in the verse: *So that He may confirm the truth and bring falsehood to naught, though the guilty should be averse* (8:8).

So making their works go astray means to frustrate them, ruin them and prevent them from achieving their objectives. This is called "going astray" in a metaphorical sense.

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَآمَنُوا بِمَا نُزِّلَ عَلَىٰ مُحَمَّدٍ وَهُوَ الْحَقُّ
مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ ۙ كَفَّرَ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَأَصْلَحَ بَالَهُمْ ﴿٢﴾

(47:2) ***But those who have faith and do righteous deeds and believe in what has been sent down to Muḥammad—and it is the truth from their Lord—He shall absolve them of their misdeeds and set right their affairs.***

The apparent meaning of *those who have faith and do righteous deeds…* at the beginning of the verse is anyone who believes and does righteous deeds, in which case when God says: *deeds and believe in what has been sent down to Muḥammad*. This is not merely to emphasise faith, but to limit the scope of its meaning and reveal God's main concern with it here.

And it is the truth from their Lord: This is an aside (*jumlah muʿtariḍah*); *it* refers to *what has been sent down to Muḥammad*.

He shall absolve them of their misdeeds and set right their affairs: In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, we read:

"Affairs" (*bāl*) means their condition or state, it can also mean one's heart (*qalb*), as one might say: "Such-and-such occurred to me…" (*khaṭara bi bālī kadhā*); it takes no plural form because it is more ambiguous than "condition" (*ḥāl*) or "state" (*shaʾn*).

Here, making their works *go astray* in the previous verse is contrasted with absolving the faithful of their misdeeds and setting right their affairs in this one. This means that their faith and righteous acts will lead them to the utmost happiness, and this can only transpire through the absolution of their misdeeds which prevent them from attaining happiness. This is

why God connects the absolution of their misdeeds to setting right their affairs.

So this means that God will cast a curtain upon their misdeeds through clemency and forgiveness, and set right their affairs in this world and the Hereafter. As for this world, this is because the True Religion is the religion that is in harmony with the innate nature (*fiṭrah*) upon which God created mankind. This innate nature only entails that which contains its only felicity and perfection, so believing in what God has sent down of the religion of nature (*dīn al-fiṭrah*) and acting upon it will inevitably set right that condition of the faithful in their worldly society. As for in the Hereafter, this is because it is the outcome of this worldly existence; if there is a felicitous beginning, then there is a felicitous end also. God says: *and the outcome will be in favor of Godwariness* (20:132).

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا اتَّبَعُوا الْبَاطِلَ وَأَنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّبَعُوا الْحَقَّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ يَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ أَمْثَالَهُمْ ﴿٣﴾

(47:3) ***That is because the faithless follow falsehood, and because the faithful follow the truth from their Lord. That is how God draws comparisons for mankind.***

This verse expounds the wisdom behind what the previous two verses say, namely the sending astray of the deeds of the faithless and the setting right of the condition of the faithful and the absolution of their misdeeds.

By qualifying *the truth* (al-ḥaqq) with *from their Lord* (min rabbihim), God intimates that only the truth is connected to Him and that falsehood has no relation to Him whatsoever. That is why God personally takes responsibility for setting right the affairs of the faithful in that the way of truth which they follow is connected to Him, while God has nothing to do with the faithless. He only says that He will make their works *go astray* in the sense that He will not guide them to felicitous and righteous goals.

This verse shows that the ultimate criterion for the happiness or misery of the human being is whether they follow truth or falsehood, as only the truth is connected to God, not falsehood.

That is how God draws comparisons for mankind in order to make clear the reality of their attributes, and by using the demonstrative pronoun *that*—which is normally used to signify something at a distance—this magnifies the way in which God has drawn these comparisons.

فَإِذَا لَقِيتُمُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَضَرْبَ الرِّقَابِ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا أَثْخَنتُمُوهُمْ فَشُدُّوا الْوَثَاقَ فَإِمَّا مَنًّا بَعْدُ وَإِمَّا فِدَاءً حَتَّىٰ تَضَعَ الْحَرْبُ أَوْزَارَهَا ۚ ذَٰلِكَ وَلَوْ يَشَاءُ اللَّهُ لَانتَصَرَ مِنْهُمْ وَلَٰكِن لِّيَبْلُوَ بَعْضَكُم بِبَعْضٍ ۗ وَالَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَلَن يُضِلَّ أَعْمَالَهُمْ ﴿٤﴾

(47:4) ***When you meet the faithless [in battle], strike their necks. When you have thoroughly decimated them, bind the captives firmly. Thereafter either oblige them or take ransom till the war lays down its burdens. That, and had God wished He could have taken vengeance on them, but that He may test some of you by means of others. As for those who were slain in the way of God, He will not let their works go astray.***

This follows logically from the description of the two groups in the above verses. It is as if to say: The faithful are the people of truth and God gives them His blessings, while the faithless are the people of falsehood and God sends their deeds astray. Therefore the faithful should kill the faithless when they meet them [in battle] and take them prisoner in order to preserve the truth which they follow and to purify the earth of all falsehood.

When you meet the faithless [in battle], strike their necks…: *Meet* means when you meet them in battle. In the Arabic *strike their necks* appears as an absolute object (*mafʿūl muṭlaq*)[1] giving the meaning of the verb. In other words: "strike the necks"—that is, *their* necks—and striking a person's neck is a euphemism for killing them with a sword. This is because the quickest and easiest way to kill someone with a sword is to strike their neck with it.

Until when you have thoroughly decimated them, bind the ties firmly…: In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, we read:

> "Decimate" (*ithkhān*) means to kill many enemies, overcome them, and vanquish them. It is in this sense that one says an illness has "decimated" a person when it is severe or the same for a person's wounds.

1 The Arabic reads lit. "*When you meet the faithless [in battle], then a striking of necks….*" [Trans.]

In *al-Mufradāt*, we read:

> The root *w-th-q* means to rely on someone or be content with them. The verb *awthaqa* means to bind someone, and *wathāq* or *withāq* mean the ties used to bind a thing.

Until (ḥattā) signifies the goal or end for striking their necks *in battle*.

So this phrase means [in the context of battlefield]: "Kill them until you have slain many, then take them prisoner by binding them tightly." So the meaning of *bind the ties firmly* is to take prisoners. So the verse makes taking prisoners dependent upon killing, as in the verse elsewhere: *A prophet may not take captives until he has thoroughly decimated [the enemy] in the land.* (8:67)

Thereafter either oblige them or take ransom…: In other words, take them prisoners. Then when you have done this you can either oblige them after taking them prisoner by setting them free or enslaving them, or ransom them in return for money or for your own prisoners.

…till the war lays down its burdens: The burdens of war are its weights, meaning the weapons that the combatants carry. So this means that the fighters and soldiers lay down their arms, symbolizing the cessation of hostilities.

From the above it should be clear what the problem is with the claim that this verse abrogates the verse *A prophet may not take captives until he has thoroughly decimated [the enemy] in the land* (8:67) because this sūrah was revealed after Sūrah al-Anfāl. This is because there is no contradiction between the two verses; the verse of Sūrah al-Anfāl prohibits taking prisoners before decimating the enemy, and the verse under discussion also indicates that prisoners must be taken after fighting.

The same applies to the claim that the words *bind the ties firmly* were abrogated by the Sword Verse: *…kill the polytheists wherever you find them…* (9:5) as if the proponents of this think that a general verse revealed after a particular one abrogates it rather than being limited by it. In fact, the opposite is true—the full discussion of this can be found in the study of *Uṣūl*. This verse also has jurisprudential implications which are dealt with in the science of *Fiqh*.

That, and had God wished He could have taken vengeance on them… *That* means the command is that or that is God's ordinance. *Them* refers to the faithless; namely, if God had wished to take vengeance from them, he would have done so by destroying them and punishing them directly without commanding you to fight them.

…but that He may test some of you by means of others… This supplements what He says about wishing to take vengeance. In other words: But he did not take vengeance upon them, instead he commanded you to fight them to test you by means of one another. He tests the faithful with the faithless by commanding them to fight them to distinguish the obedient ones from the sinners, and He tests the faithless through the faithful to distinguish those who are destined for misery from those who will attain the success of repenting of falsehood and returning to the truth.

And with the words *but that He may test some of you by means of others* he explains the wisdom behind the ruling mentioned in the verse. And *some of you* refers to both the faithful and the faithless, even though it is addressed primarily to the faithful.

As for those who were slain in the way of God, He will not let their works go astray: The tone of this verse reveals it is a condition (*sharṭ*) and a general rule (*ḥukm ʿāmm*), namely that whoever is slain in the way of God, namely in the way of struggle (*jihād*) and warfare (*qitāl*) against the enemies of the religion, their righteous deeds that they performed in the way of God will not be in vain.

It is said: *Those who were slain in the way of God* refers to the martyrs at the Battle of Uḥud. However, there is nothing to suggest such a restriction in the verses themselves, and the tone of the verse is general in character.

سَيَهْدِيهِمْ وَيُصْلِحُ بَالَهُمْ ۝٥

(47:5) *He will guide them and set right their affairs.*

Them refers to those slain in the way of God, so this verse and those following it expound their condition after their martyrdom. This means that God will guide them to the abodes of felicity and nobility, and set right their affairs through clemency and forgiveness for their misdeeds, meaning that they will be worthy of entering paradise.

If we put this verse beside God's words in Sūrah Āl ʿImrān—*Do not suppose those who were slain in the way of God to be dead; rather they are living and provided for near their Lord* (3:169)—it becomes clear that *set right their affairs* means giving them a life in which they are worthy of being in the presence of their Lord through the removal of the veil separating them from Him.

In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, we read:

> The phrase s*et right their affairs* is repeated because in the first

instance it means that He will set right their affairs in their religion and worldly life, while in the second instance it means He will set right their affairs in the comfort of the Hereafter. So the first instance is the cause for their comfort and the second instance is the comfort itself.

The difference between this and what we have said is that our reading makes *set right their affairs* an explanatory conjunction for *He will guide them* while the reading quoted from *Majmaʿ* does not. Instead, it makes the phrase in the following verse, *and admit them into paradise…* an explanatory conjunction for *set right their affairs*.

وَيُدْخِلُهُمُ الْجَنَّةَ عَرَّفَهَا لَهُمْ ۝٦

(47:6) *and admit them into paradise with which He has acquainted them.*

This reveals the destination to which He guides them above. *With which He has acquainted them* is a circumstantial qualifier for His admitting them to paradise. In other words, He will admit them to paradise while it is the case He has acquainted them with it, either by explaining it in this world through revelation and prophethood, through glad tidings given to them when He received their souls, while they were in their graves, on the Day of Resurrection itself, or at all of these stages. This is what the context of the verse suggests.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn Mardawayh narrates from ʿAlī:
Sūrah Muḥammad contains a verse about us and a verse about the Banū Umayyah.

Author's comments: In his *Tafsīr*, al-Qummī narrates a similar narration from his father, from "some of our companions" from Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq].

(2) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, concerning His saying: *So when you meet the faithless [in battle], strike their necks…*, it is narrated from "the Imāms of Guidance":
Prisoners are of two varieties: [First,] those taken before the cessation of hostilities while the war is going on, in which case the Imām may choose whether to execute them or cut off their hands and feet on opposing sides and leave them until they bleed

to death, and it is not permitted to oblige them or ransom them. [Second,] those taken after the war has laid down its burdens and fighting has ceased, in which case the Imām may either oblige them or ransom them—whether for money or in a prisoner exchange—and if the prisoners embrace Islam in either situation, then none of these options apply to them and they must be treated as Muslims.

Author's comments: A narration to the same effect is narrated in *al-Kāfī* from Abū ʿAbd Allāh.

(3) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn Mundhir relates from Ibn Jarīḥ about the verse *As for those who were slain in the way of God, He will not let their works go astray* (47:4):

It was revealed about the Companions of the Prophet who were killed at the Battle of Uḥud.

Author's comments: We have already seen that this verse is general in its import; the future-tense statement found in the following verse *He will guide them and set right their affairs* only makes sense if God is setting down a general principle.

It has also been narrated that the phrase …*till the war lays down its burdens* (47:4) abrogates the statement *A prophet may not take captives*… (8:67), and also that the verse …*kill the polytheists wherever you find them*… (9:5) abrogates the statement in this sūrah: …*bind the ties firmly. Thereafter either oblige them or take ransom*... (47:4). But we have already pointed to the lack of probity in this abrogation.

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Verses 7–15

This set of verses follow those that came before them in context and tone.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنْ تَنْصُرُوا اللَّهَ يَنْصُرْكُمْ وَيُثَبِّتْ أَقْدَامَكُمْ ۝٧

(47:7) ***O you who have faith! If you help God, He will help you and make your feet steady.***

This verse encourages the faithful to struggle and promises them divine assistance should they help God. To "help God" means that they struggle in God's way by fighting for the sake of God to support His religion and raise the word of truth, rather than for the sake of seizing power in the land, winning booty or demonstrating their bravery or prowess.

God helping them means that He will bring about the necessary conditions for their victory over their enemies, such as casting fear into the hearts of the faithless, turning the misfortunes of the faithful against them, and giving composure to the faithful and inspiring them with bravery. Read in this way, appending *and make your feet steady* to *He will help you* represents a conjunction of a specific clause following a general one. The reason why He singles out for mention *make your feet steady*—which alludes to bravery and morale—is because it is one of the most apparent reasons for victory.

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَتَعْسًا لَهُمْ وَأَضَلَّ أَعْمَالَهُمْ ۝٨

(47:8) ***As for the faithless, their lot will be to fall, and He will make their works go astray.***

God mentions what He will do with the faithless after mentioning what He will do with the faithful who help Him in order to draw a comparison between their respective conditions.

To fall (taʿs) means to fall flat on one's face and remain in that condition, as opposed to getting up after falling on one's face. So *their lot will be to fall* means that they will fall flat on their faces, and this reads like an invocation against them, as when God says *God assail them! Where do they stray?!* (9:30) and *Perish man! How ungrateful is he!* (80:17). However

it can also be read as foretelling that they will fall and that all their efforts will be fruitless by way of allusion, for a person is most helpless when he is lying flat on his face.

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَرِهُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأَحْبَطَ أَعْمَالَهُمْ ﴿٩﴾

(47:9) ***That is because they loathed what God has sent down, so He made their works fail.***

What God has sent down means the Qur'an, the teachings and the laws which God has sent down to His Prophet whom He has commanded people to obey, so they loathed it and disdained to follow him. This verse explains the reason for what is mentioned in the verse before it, and its meaning is clear.

أَفَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ ۚ دَمَّرَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ ۖ وَلِلْكَافِرِينَ أَمْثَالُهَا ﴿١٠﴾

(47:10) ***Have they not travelled over the land so that they may observe how was the fate of those who were before them? God destroyed them, and likenesses of it await the faithless.***

When this verse says that God *destroyed them* (dammar allāhu ʿalayhim), this means that He caused them to perish (*ihlāk*). However, to cause someone to perish refers only to his own life, his family, his home and his possessions. Destruction (*tadmīr*) is said to be more intense in its meaning. *It* in *likenesses of it* refers to the punishment indicated at the beginning of the verse. *The faithless* means those who disbelieve in the Prophet.

This renders the meaning: "And those who disbelieve in you—O Muḥammad!—shall suffer a similar fate!" They are promised *likenesses* (plural) even though they can only suffer one such fate because they stand exposed and vulnerable to many different worldly and otherworldly punishments, even if only one of these will ultimately befall them. However the verse could also be referring to all the faithless, not just those who disbelieved in the Prophet, in which case this sentence should be read as God setting down a general rule.

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ مَوْلَى الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَأَنَّ الْكَافِرِينَ لَا مَوْلَىٰ لَهُمْ ﴿١١﴾

(47:11) *That is because God is the protector of the faithful, and because the faithless have no protector.*

Here, the demonstrative *that* refers to what has been discussed in the above verses; the divine assistance of the faithful, the failure of the faithless and the evil fate that awaits them. No heed should be paid to those who say *that* is used to affirm the punishment or fate of previous nations for them, or to those who say that it refers to the divine assistance of the faithful. This is because the actual content of the verse deals with the condition of both groups, faithful and faithless, together.

Protector (mawlā) is a *mīm* verbal noun which suggests an adjectival meaning; it is used in the sense of *walī*. This is why the word *mawlā* is used for a slave's master and owner, because he has the authority (*wilāyah*) to intervene in his slave's affairs. It is also used for a helper because he also intervenes in the affairs of the one who receives his help by strengthening and supporting him. God is the sovereign who looks after the affairs of His creation on the path of generation and manages it however He wishes. God says: *You do not have besides Him any guardian or intercessor* (32:4). Elsewhere, He says: *…and they will be returned to God, their real master…* (10:30). God is a *mawlā* because He looks after the affairs of His servants on the path to felicity, guiding them to happiness and paradise, granting them success in doing righteous deeds and giving them assistance against their enemies. This kind of mastery (*mawlawiyyah*) is only for the faithful, because they alone are within the compass of servanthood (*ʿubūdiyyah*) and follow what their Lord wants from them, while the faithless do not.

The faithful have a protector (*walī*) and master (*mawlā*), namely God: *That is because God is the protector of the faithful* (47:11), and God says elsewhere: *God is the Guardian of the faithful…* (2:257). As for the faithless, they have taken idols or the deities of those idols as protectors; according to them, these deities are their guardians. Based on their claim, God says out of derision: *As for the faithless, their patrons are the Rebels* (2:257). But based on the reality of the situation, God denies that they have any guardian whatsoever: *…and because the faithless have no protector* (47:11). Then God denies their guardianship whatsoever, whether in creation or legislation by saying: *Have they taken guardians besides Him? It is God who is the Guardian* (42:9), and: *These are but names which you have coined—you and your fathers* (53:23).

So the meaning of the verse is: God will help the faithful and steady

their feet, and abandon the faithless, send their works and their fate astray. This is only because God is the protector of the faithful and their master, while the faithless have no protector to help them, guide their actions or save them from their fate.

Based on the above, we can see the obvious weakness in what is said: *Protector* in the verse means a helper rather than a master; otherwise, this would contradict God's saying: *and they will be returned to God, their real master* (10:30). The weakness of this argument is clear.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُدْخِلُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ۖ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا يَتَمَتَّعُونَ وَيَأْكُلُونَ كَمَا تَأْكُلُ الْأَنْعَامُ وَالنَّارُ مَثْوًى لَهُمْ ﴿١٢﴾

(47:12) ***Indeed God will admit those who have faith and do righteous deeds into gardens with streams running in them. As for the faithless, they enjoy and eat just like the cattle eat, and the Fire will be their abode.***

This continues the comparison between the two groups and demonstrates the effect of God's guardianship (*wilāyah*) of the faithful and the absence thereof for the faithless on their ultimate fates in the Hereafter. In short, the faithful will enter paradise as a result while the faithless will reside in hellfire.

The source of this has been highlighted in the discourse when each of the two groups are described with what befits their ultimate condition; He refers to the qualities of the faithful by saying: *those who have faith and do righteous deeds*, while He refers to the qualities of the faithless by saying: *As for the faithless, they enjoy and eat just like the cattle eat*…. From these two descriptions we see clearly the contrast between the two groups; the faithful are rightly-guided in their worldly lives, having found the truth, believed in God and done righteous deeds. The faithful follow the path of right-guidance and perform their human moral duties. Meanwhile, the faithless have no concern with finding the truth, nor do their hearts feel any connection to their human moral duties; their only concern is their appetites and lusts which they enjoy in this short worldly life of theirs. They eat as cattle eat; they have no hope or ambition except to consume.

So one group—namely the faithful—are under God's guardianship;

they follow the path their Lord wishes them to follow and He guides them to it. This is why He will admit them to the gardens of paradise beneath which rivers flow in the Hereafter. Meanwhile the other group—the faithless—God has left them to their own devices, which is why their refuge and abode will be the Fire.

God says that He Himself will admit the faithful to paradise but does not say that He will admit the faithless to hell only because the former involves discharging His duty of guardianship to the faithful that we mentioned above; God has a special concern (*ʿināyah*) for His friends (*awliyāʾ*). As for those who are detached from His guardianship, He does not care which valley they end up in.

وَكَأَيِّنْ مِنْ قَرْيَةٍ هِيَ أَشَدُّ قُوَّةً مِنْ قَرْيَتِكَ الَّتِي أَخْرَجَتْكَ أَهْلَكْنَاهُمْ فَلَا نَاصِرَ لَهُمْ ﴿١٣﴾

(47:13) ***How many a town there has been which was more powerful than your town which expelled you, whom We have destroyed, and they had no helper.***

By *a town*, God means its inhabitants as indicated by the phrase *whom We have destroyed* (ahlaknāhum).[1] And *your town which expelled you* is Mecca.

This verse is meant to strengthen the heart of the Prophet, threaten the inhabitants of Mecca and deride their condition; God has destroyed many towns, all of which were more powerful than their own and ultimately these towns had no one to help them against Him!

أَفَمَنْ كَانَ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّهِ كَمَنْ زُيِّنَ لَهُ سُوءُ عَمَلِهِ وَاتَّبَعُوا أَهْوَاءَهُمْ ﴿١٤﴾

(47:14) ***Is he who stands on a manifest proof from his Lord like someone to whom the evil of his conduct is made to seem decorous, and who follow their desires?***

This verse falls within the context of comparing the condition of the faithful and the faithless, which indicates that *he who stands on a manifest*

1 This is because the direct object of the verb is the masculine plural pronoun *hum*, which is only used for intelligent beings. Had God been referring to the town itself, He would have used the feminine singular plural (*hā*). [Trans.]

proof from his Lord refers to the faithful. Standing on a manifest proof (*bayyinah*) from their Lord means that they are following a proof from their Lord that gives them certainty (*yaqīn*) in what they believe. This means a logical argument. In other words, they only follow a definitive proof, as befits any human being whose habit is to use his intellect and follow the truth.

As for the faithless, they are infatuated by their evil actions, which have been made to seem decorous by Satan and which are connected to their low desires (*ahwāʾ*), so they do evil deeds. What a difference there is between these two groups!

مَثَلُ الْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي وُعِدَ الْمُتَّقُونَ ۖ فِيهَا أَنْهَارٌ مِنْ مَاءٍ غَيْرِ آسِنٍ وَأَنْهَارٌ مِنْ لَبَنٍ لَمْ يَتَغَيَّرْ طَعْمُهُ وَأَنْهَارٌ مِنْ خَمْرٍ لَذَّةٍ لِلشَّارِبِينَ وَأَنْهَارٌ مِنْ عَسَلٍ مُصَفًّى ۖ وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ ۖ كَمَنْ هُوَ خَالِدٌ فِي النَّارِ وَسُقُوا مَاءً حَمِيمًا فَقَطَّعَ أَمْعَاءَهُمْ ﴿١٥﴾

(47:15) ***A similitude of the paradise promised to the Godwary: therein are streams of unstaling water, and streams of milk unchanging in flavour, and streams of wine delicious to the drinkers, and streams of purified honey; there will be for them every kind of fruit in it, and forgiveness from their Lord. Like those who abide in the Fire and are given to drink boiling water which cuts up their bowels?***

This verse distinguishes the two groups based on the ultimate outcome of their affairs. In fact, this explains what God meant when He said: *Indeed God will admit those who have faith…* (47:12). So this verse can be read as expanding upon that one.

A similitude of the paradise promised to the Godwary… It has been said that *similitude* (mathal) means description. In other words, "a description of the paradise to which God has promised to admit the Godwary." Perhaps we can also read *similitude* in its conventional sense and from this glean that paradise is too lofty and magnificent to be encapsulated by any human description or defined by mortal language. This means that whatever similitudes we read here are merely to help our limited minds come to an approximate understanding of the nature of paradise, as suggested by the verse: *No one knows what has been kept hidden for them of*

comfort (32:17).

Here, the phrase from the previous verse *those who have faith and do righteous deeds* (47:12) has been interchanged with *the Godwary* (muttaqūn). This is like mentioning the cause in place of its effect, as Godwariness (*taqwā*) requires one to believe in God and do righteous deeds.

…therein are streams of unstaling water… Meaning streams that never change through length of time.

…and streams of milk unchanging in flavour…—unlike the milk of this world.

…and streams of wine, delicious to the drinkers… Meaning which the drinkers will find delicious; here *delicious* (ladhdha) is either a feminine adjective for wine, or it is a verbal noun being used as an adjective for hyperbole,[1] or a verbal noun in an implicit construct state—that is, "containing deliciousness for the drinkers."

…and streams of purified honey: It means honey that is free from wax, froth, dross or any of the impurities that affect honey in this world.

…there will be for them all fruits in it… The plural *fruits* is used to signify generality.

…and forgiveness from their Lord: With forgiveness, all of their sins will be removed from them; their lives in the Hereafter will be unspoiled and unsullied. Saying *from their Lord* alludes to God's all-enveloping mercy, compassion and kindness.

Like those who abide in the Fire… This is a comparison, one of whose sides has been left implicit. In other words: "Are those who enter paradise whose similitude is such like those who are consigned to hell where their drink is scalding water which cuts up their bowels and innards when they drink it?" And they only drink this water while detesting it; *…and are given to drink boiling water which cuts up their bowels*?

It is said: *Like those who abide in the Fire* is an exposition of the previous verse *…like someone to whom the evil of his conduct is made to seem decorous…* (47:14). And this reading is as you see it.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān*, about the verse: *That is because they loathed what God has sent down, so He made their works fail* (47:9), it is

1 That is, "Streams of wine, deliciousness itself for the drinkers" [Trans.]

narrated that Abū Jaʿfar [Imām al-Bāqir] said:
They loathed what God has sent down concerning the status of ʿAlī.

(2) Therein we also read that regarding …*like someone to whom the evil of his conduct is made to seem decorous*… (47:14), it is said:
They are the hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*). This is narrated from Abū Jaʿfar [Imām al-Bāqir] as well.

Author's comments: It is possible that these two narrations are in accordance with the meanings of the verses.

(3) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, concerning the verse *Like those who abide in the Fire and are given to drink boiling water which cuts up their bowels*? (47:15), we read:
Whoever is in the paradise described in this verse is not like those who are in hell, just as the enemy of God is not like His friend.

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Verses 16–32

These verses are also in the same context as those above; they deal with the condition of those who have a sickness in their hearts, the hypocrites, and those who apostatize after believing.

وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَسْتَمِعُ إِلَيْكَ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا خَرَجُوا مِنْ عِنْدِكَ قَالُوا لِلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ مَاذَا قَالَ آنِفًا ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ طَبَعَ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ وَاتَّبَعُوا أَهْوَاءَهُمْ ﴿١٦﴾

(47:16) ***There are some among them who prick up their ears at you. But when they go out from your presence, they say to those who have been given knowledge, "What did he say just now?" They are the ones on whose hearts God has set a seal and they follow their own desires.***

Just now (ānifan) is an active participle in the accusative because it is either a qualifier of time (*ẓarf*) or a locative object (*mafʿūl fīh*). It means "a short time ago". It is also said: It means "right now". In any case, it is derived from *anf*, the nose.

In *there are some among them who prick up their ears at you…*, *them* refers to the faithless, and their listening to the Prophet means to pay attention to him reciting the Qur'an and his explanation of the principles of knowledge and the teachings of the religion.

But when they go out from your presence…, *they* refers to *some among them who…* Here in Arabic the plural form is used in consideration of the meaning, while above the verb *prick up their ears at you* is singular in consideration of the word "who" (*man*) rather than its meaning.

…they say to those who have been given knowledge, "What did he say just now?" *Those who have been given knowledge* refers to those Companions who knew God. *He* refers to the Prophet.

As for their question: *What did he say just now?* It is said that they want to know the meaning (*ḥaqīqah*) of what he said because they are so immersed in pride, conceit and following their whims that it does not allow them to comprehend true speech, as God says: *What is the matter*

with these people that they would not understand any matter? (4:78).

It is also said: They say it in derision.

And it is said: They say it to belittle what was said. As if to say that the speech was so loaded with vanities that it did not really contain any meaning.

And each of these three readings has an element of validity to it.

They are the ones on whose hearts God has set a seal: This is a characterisation of them—*and they follow their own desires*—and this is yet another characterisation of them, so this conjunction is like an explanatory one. From this we understand that following desires is a symptom of having your heart sealed by God; a heart which has not been sealed remains in its original state of pure nature (*fiṭrah*) which is not prevented from understanding religious teachings or divine truths.

وَالَّذِينَ اهْتَدَوْا زَادَهُمْ هُدًى وَآتَاهُمْ تَقْوَاهُمْ ﴿١٧﴾

(47:17) ***As for those who are guided, He enhances their guidance, and invests them with their Godwariness.***

The obvious contrast between this verse and the one immediately before it suggests that *guidance* (ihtidāʾ) here means the opposite of going astray (*ḍalāl*), which goes with having a seal on one's heart. Guidance, on the other hand, means submitting to what a healthy human nature (*fiṭrah salīmah*) guides you to and following the truth. God enhancing their guidance means that He elevates the level of their faith, and we have already discussed how guidance and faith have different degrees. *Godwariness* means the opposite of following one's desires, namely observing God's prohibitions and avoiding committing sins.

This shows that enhancing guidance means completing them with respect to knowledge, while investing them with Godwariness means completing them with respect to practice. From the contrast with the previous verse, we also see that sealing the hearts means losing the virtue of knowledge, while following the desires means lacking righteous deeds and being deprived of them. And this does not contradict what we have said above, namely that *and they follow their own desires* is an exposition of *they are the ones on whose hearts God has set a seal.*

فَهَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا السَّاعَةَ أَنْ تَأْتِيَهُمْ بَغْتَةً ۖ فَقَدْ جَاءَ أَشْرَاطُهَا ۚ فَأَنَّىٰ لَهُمْ

إِذَا جَاءَتْهُمْ ذِكْرَاهُمْ ﴿١٨﴾

(47:18) ***Do they await anything except the Hour, that it should overtake them suddenly? Certainly its portents have come. Of what avail to them will their admonition be when it overtakes them?***

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Portents (ashrāṭ) is the plural of *sharṭ*, meaning "mark" (*ʿalāmah*); the original meaning of *sharṭ* is that upon which the existence of another entity depends because when the mark of something comes into being, that means the thing-itself has come into being. Therefore the portents of the Hour are the signs which point to it.

The tone of this verse is disdainful, as if to portray them standing at a juncture; either they will follow the truth and have a happy outcome, or they are awaiting the Hour in order to be absolutely sure of its coming and to see it for themselves; then they will take admonition, believe and follow the truth. As for following the truth in the here and now, no proof, admonition or lesson will convince them to submit themselves to it. As for awaiting the coming of the Hour to take admonition when it does, this will not benefit them in the slightest, for it will come suddenly and it will not give them any respite to make ready for it through taking admonition. When the Hour sets in, no amount of admonition will benefit them because that day will be a day of recompense, not a day of work. God says: *The day when hell is brought near, on that day man will take admonition but what will the admonition avail him? He will say, "Alas, had I sent ahead for my life!"* (89:23–24)

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Not to mention that its signs and portents have already come and set in! Perhaps one of its portents is the creation of the human being and the division of the human race into righteous and corrupt, Godwary and sinners, which requires there to be a judgement between them and the sending down of death upon them. All of these are signs of the coming event and the setting in of the Hour. It is said: The "portents of the Hour" means the appearance of the Prophet, who is the Seal of the Prophets, the splitting of the Moon, and the sending down of the Qur'an, which is God's final revelation to mankind.

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This is what is understood by pondering on the meaning of this verse which is—as you can see—a logical argument, even though it carries a tone of derision.

Therefore, when God says *suddenly*, this is a circumstantial qualifier for the coming of the Hour, and it is used to expound the reality of the matter. Following logically from this, God says *Of what avail to them will their admonition be when it overtakes them?* However, *suddenly* should not be read as qualifying *await*, such that they are waiting for it to come suddenly! That is why God says *except the Hour, that it should overtake them suddenly*, and He does not say "except that the Hour should overtake them suddenly."

Of what avail to them will their admonition be when it overtakes them?—*Of what avail* is an advanced predicate (*khabar muqaddam*), and *their admonition* is a delayed subject (*mubtadaʾ muʾakhkhar*), and *when it overtakes them* is an aside that interposes between them. It means: "How shall they take admonition when it comes to them? How will they benefit from admonition on a day when no deeds will benefit their doer because it is only a day of recompense."

Other opinions have been given about the meaning of this verse and its sentences, but we have not seen fit to present them here. Interested readers can refer to the more detailed books of commentary.

فَاعْلَمْ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لِذَنبِكَ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مُتَقَلَّبَكُمْ وَمَثْوَاكُمْ ﴿١٩﴾

(47:19) ***"So know that there is no god except God, and plead for forgiveness of your sin and for the faithful, men and women. God knows your itinerary and your abode."***

It is said: This follows from everything that has been said so far in this sūrah concerning the felicity of the faithful and the misery of the faithless. This is as if to say: If you have understood that the matter is as it has been described above—concerning the felicity of these and the misery of those—then stand firm upon your knowledge of God's oneness. So according to this reading, the command *know…* means to stand firm upon knowledge.

It is possible that this could follow logically from the contrast drawn in the above two verses—meaning *There are some among them who prick up their ears at you…* (47:16) and *…and invests them with their Godwariness.* (47:17)—that God seals the hearts of the idolaters and leaves them with their sins, while the opposite is true for those who are guided to Divine

Unity and faith in it. So it is as if to say: If this is the case, then cling tightly to your knowledge of Divine Unity, seek forgiveness for your sin and forgiveness of your community (*ummah*) of those who believe in you and the faithful so that you will not be one of those whose hearts God has sealed, from whom He has withheld Godwariness and who He has left alone with their sins. This reading is supported by the words at the end of the verse: *God knows your itinerary and your abode* (47:19).

In this case *so know that there is no god except God* means, according to the context of the verse, to hold fast to your knowledge that there is no god except God.

And plead for forgiveness of your sin…: We have already spoken about the proper understanding of any "sin" (*dhanb*) ascribed to the Prophet, and we shall discuss it further when commenting on the opening verses of Sūrah al-Fatḥ, God-willing.

…and for the faithful, men and women: God commands His messenger to plead forgiveness for the faithful men and women; and far be it from God to command someone to seek forgiveness and not respond by forgiving him, or to command him to pray and not respond by answer his prayers!

God knows your itinerary and your abode: This provides the rationale for the beginning of the verse: *so know that…*. Meanwhile, *itinerary* (mutaqallab) appears to be a *mīm* verbal noun meaning to move from one state to another, while *abode* (mathwā) appears to be a *mīm* verbal noun with the meaning of being settled and still. This means that God knows all of your states, whether changing or fixed, whether in motion or stationary, so stand firm upon your belief in Divine Unity, seek His forgiveness and beware your hearts being sealed and being left alone with your desires.

It is said: *Itinerary* and *abode* mean your behavior in this world and your abode in the Hereafter.

It is said: *Mutaqallab* actually means to move from the loins to the wombs, while *mathwā* means to rest in the earth.

It is said: *Mutaqallab* means your activity while awake, while *mathwā* means your sleep.

And it is said: *Mutaqallab* means the activity you undertake to subsist and earn a living, while *mathwā* means to reside in your home. However, what we have said is closer to the apparent meaning and more general.

وَيَقُولُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَوْلَا نُزِّلَتْ سُورَةٌ ۖ فَإِذَا أُنْزِلَتْ سُورَةٌ مُحْكَمَةٌ وَذُكِرَ

فِيهَا الْقِتَالُ ۙ رَأَيْتَ الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَيْكَ نَظَرَ الْمَغْشِيِّ
عَلَيْهِ مِنَ الْمَوْتِ ۖ فَأَوْلَىٰ لَهُمْ ﴿٢٠﴾

(47:20) *The faithful say, "If only a sūrah were sent down!" But when a definitive sūrah is sent down and war is mentioned in it, you see those in whose hearts is a sickness looking upon you with the look of someone fainting at death. So they deserve!*

If only… is used in the sense of urging, in other words: "Will a sūrah not come down?" They display enthusiasm for a new sūrah being revealed which will bring them new moral duties to obey. *A definitive* sūrah means one which is clear and without ambiguity. War being *mentioned* means that a command to fight is issued. *Those in whose hearts is a sickness* refers to those believers whose faith is weak, but not the hypocrites as the verse explicitly says that those who display enthusiasm for its revelation are the faithful. The term *faithful* does not encompass the hypocrites unless it is used with a liberality that does not befit the Divine Discourse. Therefore, this verse resembles the words of God concerning a group of the faithful: *Have you not regarded those who were told, "Keep your hands off [from warfare], and maintain the prayer, and give the zakat"? But when fighting was prescribed for them, behold, a part of them were afraid of people as if fearing God, or were even more afraid…* (4:77).

Fainting at death means someone who is on his death bed. The word for fainting, *ghashiyah* literally means when something is covered or veiled. We say someone is "covered" (*ghashā ʿalā fulān*) when they are afflicted by something that covers their comprehension (*fahm*). *The look of someone fainting at death* means when a person fixes his eyes upon you without blinking.

So they deserve! could be the predicate of an implicit subject, namely: "That befits them!" In other words, they should look like someone on their death bed. Al-Aṣmaʿī says that *so they deserve!* is used as a threat, meaning "Woe to you!" and "You shall have what you hate!" So this verse is like God's saying: *So woe to you! Woe to you! Again, woe to you! Woe to you!* (75:34–35)

The meaning of the verse is: The faithful say "Will a sūrah not come down?" But when a definitive and unambiguous sūrah comes down in which they are commanded to fight and struggle, you see those of them

with weak faith looking at you with the gaze of one on his deathbed out of extreme fear, and they deserve that!

طَاعَةٌ وَقَوْلٌ مَعْرُوفٌ ۚ فَإِذَا عَزَمَ الْأَمْرُ فَلَوْ صَدَقُوا اللَّهَ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ ﴿٢١﴾

(47:21) *Obedience and upright speech. So when the matter has been resolved upon, if they remain true to God that will surely be better for them.*

When the matter has been resolved upon means when it has been determined and implemented.

Obedience and upright speech appears to be a predicate for an implicit subject with the meaning: "Our affair is *obedience and upright speech*" or "Their affair and their condition is *obedience and upright speech.*" In other words, their faith in Us is obedience in which they trust Us, and that they speak upright speech to us rather than denials, meaning they show that they have heard and obeyed. This is as God relates about them elsewhere: *The Messenger has faith in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and all the faithful… and they say, "We hear and obey."* (2:285)

This means that this fragmentary phrase is plainly connected to what he says next in the verse: *So when the matter has been resolved upon, if they remain true to God that will surely be better for them.* It means: "The affair is something on whose basis they trust God because they say *'We hear and obey.'* So when the matter has been resolved upon, if they declared that what God has said is true in their speech and obeyed him in his commands—including the command to fight—then this is better for them."

However we can also read *Obedience and upright speech* as the predicate of a pronoun that refers to the fighting mentioned in the previous verse, meaning that the aforementioned fighting is obedience from them and upright speech. So if when the matter was decided they had believed in God and obeyed Him because of their faith, this would have been better for them. In this reading it is clear how this constitutes *obedience* (ṭāʿah) from them; as for *upright speech* (qawl maʿrūf), this is because the affirmation of fighting and the command to defend the righteous community in order to thwart the schemes of its enemies both constitute *upright speech* that is known to the intellect and those who use their intellects.

It is said: *Obedience and upright speech* are the subject of a nominal sentence. The predicate of this sentence is *better for them*.

It is also said: They are a subject whose predicate is *so they deserve* in

the previous verse, in which case this verse completes the one before it. And this is a poor reading.

Worse still is the reading that says that they are an adjective for "sūrah" in *when a definitive sūrah is sent down*. And other opinions have been given too.

فَهَلْ عَسَيْتُمْ إِنْ تَوَلَّيْتُمْ أَنْ تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَتُقَطِّعُوا أَرْحَامَكُمْ ﴿٢٢﴾

(47:22) ***So may it not be that if you were to turn aside*** **(tawallaytum)** ***you would cause corruption in the land and ill-treat your blood relations?***

This verse is addressed to those with a sickness in their hearts who are burdened by the command to struggle in the way of God. The discourse has shifted to address them directly to intensify the force of the rebuke. It is phrased as a rhetorical question in the affirmative. *Turn aside* (tawallī) means to turn away, meaning to turn away from the Book of God and from acting upon its contents, returning to polytheism and rejecting the Religion.

This renders the meaning of the verse thus: Is it to be expected of you that were you to turn aside from the Book of God and from acting upon its contents, including struggling in the way of God, that you would cause corruption in the earth and mistreat your relations by shedding blood, plundering wealth, and violating honour? Would you not pounce upon the corpse of this world like carrion eaters? In other words, this is what would be expected of you if you turn aside. From this it becomes clear that this verse explains the rationale for the statement *that will surely be better for them* in the previous verse. This is why the verse begins with *so* (*fa*).

It is said: *Tawallī* means to take up the reins of power and governance, in which case the verse means: "If you were given power, is it expected of you that you would cause corruption in the land and mistreat your relatives by shedding the blood of innocents, taking bribes, and ruling unjustly?" However this reading is far removed from the context of the verse.

أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ لَعَنَهُمُ اللَّهُ فَأَصَمَّهُمْ وَأَعْمَىٰ أَبْصَارَهُمْ ﴿٢٣﴾

(47:23) ***They are the ones whom God has cursed, so He made them deaf, and blinded their sight.***

They refers to those who cause corruption in the land and mistreat

their relatives; God describes them as being cursed by him. He has left them deaf and without hearing to listen to the words of truth, and He has blinded their sights so that they do not see the true opinion, for it is not the eyes that go blind but the hearts that are in the breasts.

أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ أَمْ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَا ﴿٢٤﴾

(47:24) ***Do they not contemplate the Qur'an, or are there locks on hearts?***

This is a rhetorical question intended to rebuke them. *They* refers to those mentioned in the previous verse, and it is said that *hearts* is left indefinite to show that it means both their hearts and the hearts of others like them.

In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, we read: "This verse demonstrates the falsity of the claim that we cannot interpret even the apparent parts of the Qur'an without a report or tradition."

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ارْتَدُّوا عَلَىٰ أَدْبَارِهِمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الْهُدَى ۙ الشَّيْطَانُ سَوَّلَ لَهُمْ وَأَمْلَىٰ لَهُمْ ﴿٢٥﴾

(47:25) ***Indeed those who turned their backs after the guidance had become clear to them, it was Satan who had seduced them, and he had given them hopes.***

To "turn one's back" (*irtidād ʿalā al-adbār*) means to go backwards after having come forwards, and this is a metaphor for forsaking something after having taken it up. *Seduced* (taswīl) means to make decorous what excites the low self (*nafs*) and to put something evil in a pleasant form. *Given them hopes* (imlāʾ) means to have extended and outstretched their hopes.

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُوا لِلَّذِينَ كَرِهُوا مَا نَزَّلَ اللَّهُ سَنُطِيعُكُمْ فِي بَعْضِ الْأَمْرِ ۖ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ إِسْرَارَهُمْ ﴿٢٦﴾

(47:26) ***That is because they said to those who loathed what God had sent down: "We shall obey you in some matters," and God knows their secret dealings.***

That refers to Satan seducing them and extending their hopes. In short it refers to him gaining power over them. *Those who loathed what God had sent down* means those who disbelieve, as we have already seen in the aforementioned verse: *As for the faithless, their lot will be to fall, and He will make their works go astray. That is because they loathed what God has sent down, so He made their works fail* (47:8–9).

When they say *We shall obey you in some matters*, this means they promise to obey the faithless. Qualifying this promise with the phrase *in some matters* indicates in a general sense that these are the words of someone who is not at liberty to give his full obedience in all matters to the one whom he wishes to obey because openly obeying them poses some danger to him. Instead he promises to obey them secretly in whatever he can while sitting and waiting for a change of fortunes.

From this we can deduce that these were a group of hypocrites who confided the above statement to the faithless and promised to obey them however they were able. This reading is supported by what God says next: *and God knows their secret dealings.*

Commentators have disagreed about who this verse actually refers to. Some say it is the Jews of Medina who told the hypocrites: "If you openly disbelieve, we will assist you." Others say that it was the Jews of Medina or the Jews and the hypocrites saying this to the idolaters. However, both these possibilities are excluded by the fact that the subject of the discourse in this verse are those who are apostates after believing, while the Jews have not believed in order to be counted as apostates.

It is said: They are the hypocrites promising assistance to the Jews of Medina, as God says:

Have you not regarded the hypocrites who say to their brethren, the faithless from among the People of the Book: "If you are expelled, we will surely go out with you, and we will never obey anyone against you, and if you are fought against we will surely help you." (59:11)

However, the verse they quote can be applied to this, but it can also be applied to the Jews when they promised to assist the idolaters, but only with great semantic difficulty in applying the meaning of apostasy (*iridād*) to their disbelief in God's Messenger after his message became clear to them. However there is nothing in the wording of the verse to suggest that. So perhaps they are another group of hypocrites.

فَكَيْفَ إِذَا تَوَفَّتْهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَضْرِبُونَ وُجُوهَهُمْ وَأَدْبَارَهُمْ ﴿٢٧﴾

(47:27) ***So how will it be when the angels take them away, striking their faces and their backs?!***

This follows logically from the above. It means: This is their condition today. They apostatise after guidance has become clear to them and do whatever they please. So what will be their condition when the angels take them away, striking their faces and their backs!?

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمُ اتَّبَعُوا مَا أَسْخَطَ اللَّهَ وَكَرِهُوا رِضْوَانَهُ فَأَحْبَطَ أَعْمَالَهُمْ ﴿٢٨﴾

(47:28) ***That, because they pursued what displeased God, and loathed His pleasure. So He has made their works fail.***

What displeased God appears to refer to their low desires (*ahwāʾ al-nafs*) and the seductions of Satan that result from disobeying God and committing ruinous sins, as God says: *and they follow their own desires* (47:16) and *it was Satan who had seduced them* (47:25).

God's pleasure (*riḍā*) and displeasure (*sakhṭ*) are amongst his Attributes of Act (*ṣifāt fiʿliyyah*), and they denote His reward and punishment respectively.

That refers to the description in the previous verse of the angels punishing the apostates as they take their souls. In other words, the reason for their punishment in this fashion is that their works had failed because they followed what displeased God and because they loathed His pleasure. Therefore, because they have no righteous deeds, they suffer punishment instead.

أَمْ حَسِبَ الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ أَنْ لَنْ يُخْرِجَ اللَّهُ أَضْغَانَهُمْ ﴿٢٩﴾

(47:29) ***Do those in whose hearts is a sickness suppose that God will not expose their spite?***

Al-Rāghib says: "Spite (*ḍighn* or *ḍughn*) means intense hatred." *Those in whose hearts is a sickness* refers to those who are weak in faith. And perhaps these faithful were first simply weak in their faith, then they inclined to hypocrisy[1] and apostatized after believing. A careful study of early Islamic history reveals that there was a group of people who believed

1 In other words, they became hypocrites when their hearts "died" from the sickness. [Pub.]

in the Prophet and fit this description, just as there were others who were hypocrites from the moment they believed until the end of their lives. With this in mind, the above verses count them amongst the faithful with regards to the beginning of their affair.

Therefore, this verse means: Rather these hypocrites in whose heart there is a sickness thought that God would not bring out and expose their hatred for the Religion and its followers.

وَلَوْ نَشَاءُ لَأَرَيْنَاكَهُمْ فَلَعَرَفْتَهُمْ بِسِيمَاهُمْ ۚ وَلَتَعْرِفَنَّهُمْ فِي لَحْنِ الْقَوْلِ ۚ
وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ أَعْمَالَكُمْ ﴿٣٠﴾

(47:30) ***If We wish, We will show them to you so that you recognize them by their mark. Yet you will recognize them by their tone of speech, and God knows your deeds.***

"Mark" (*simāʾ*) means brand. The verse as a whole means: If We wish, We will show you those with sick hearts and you would recognize them with the brands we have marked them with.

Yet you will recognize them in their tone of speech—al-Rāghib says:

> "Tone (*laḥn*) means to alter your speech from the way it is normally spoken, either by neglecting proper declension (*iʿrāb*) and mispronouncing words, which is a blameworthy trait (*madhmūm*)—and this is the most common usage of the word—or it can mean not speaking plainly but using insinuations and allusions, which is a praiseworthy trait in the eyes of most belletrists[1] from the perspective of rhetoric."

This means that you will recognize them from the way they speak because it is full of allusions and insinuations. And making *their tone of speech* a container for recognizing them (by using the preposition *in*) displays a kind of figurative concern.

And God knows your deeds: In other words He knows their realities and the real goals and intentions you have when you do them, so He will recompense the faithful for their righteous deeds, and others by other deeds. So this is both a promise of reward for the faithful and a warning

1 A belletrist is a person who writes essays, particularly on literary and artistic criticism, that are composed and read primarily for their aesthetic effect. [Pub.]

of punishment for others.

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ حَتَّىٰ نَعْلَمَ الْمُجَاهِدِينَ مِنْكُمْ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَنَبْلُوَ أَخْبَارَكُمْ ﴿٣١﴾

(47:31) ***We will surely try you until We ascertain those of you who wage jihad and those who are steadfast, and We shall appraise your reports.***

Try means to test or examine. This verse expounds the wisdom (ʿ*illah*) behind the prescription for the faithful to fight; it is a divine test to distinguish those who struggle in the way of God and who are steadfast in the face of difficulty when fulfilling their divine duties.

And We shall appraise your reports—Reports (akhbār) means deeds insofar as they emanate from their doers and are thus a report about them; evaluating deeds distinguishes righteous actions from vicious ones, just as testing the souls distinguishes good and righteous ones. We have already discussed previously that when God says He will ascertain something by way testing his servants, this means that He will make apparent the condition of the servants (rather than come to know anything new Himself). To be more precise, this is an act of knowledge (ʿ*ilm fiʿlī*) that is external to the Divine Essence (*dhāt*).[1]

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَصَدُّوا عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَشَاقُّوا الرَّسُولَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الْهُدَىٰ لَنْ يَضُرُّوا اللَّهَ شَيْئًا وَسَيُحْبِطُ أَعْمَالَهُمْ ﴿٣٢﴾

(47:32) ***Indeed those who are faithless and bar from the way of God and defy the Messenger after guidance has become clear to them will not hurt God in the least, and He shall make their works fail.***

This refers to the leaders of misguidance amongst the faithless of Mecca and anyone who becomes like them; they bar others from the way of God, defy the Messenger and show extreme enmity towards him even though guidance has become clear for them.

…they will not hurt God in the least… because when a human being

1 Because this kind of knowledge actually belongs to the Attributes of Act (*ṣifāt fiʿliyyah*), which denote God's actions in relation to His creatures and are therefore external to the Divine Essence. [Trans.]

plots and schemes, this only affects himself and it will not harm anyone besides him.

…and He shall make their works fail means that their efforts to destroy the foundations of the religion and extinguish God's light shall come to naught. It is said: Causing their works to fail means that they will not be rewarded for any of their deeds in the Hereafter. However, the first meaning we gave is more appropriate to the context of the verse because it is intended to encourage the faithful to fight the idolaters and reassure them that they will be victorious, as we glean from the following verses.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān*, concerning the words *There are some among them who prick up their ears at you* (47:16), it is narrated from al-Aṣbagh b. Nabātah from [Imām] ᶜAlī:
We were with God's Messenger and he would inform us of the revelation, so I and some others understood it. But when we went out, some would ask: "*What did he say just now*?"

(2) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Aḥmad, Bukhārī, Muslim, and Tirmidhī narrate from Anas:
God's Messenger said: "The Hour and I have been sent like these two." Then he held up his index finger and middle finger.

(3) Therein we also read a narration from Ibn Abī Shaybah, Bukhārī, Muslim, Ibn Mājah, and Ibn Mardawayh from Abū Hurayrah:
One day God's Messenger had come out to the people and a man came and asked him: "O Messenger of God! When is the Hour?" He said: "The one who is asked is not better informed than the asker, but I shall recount to you some of its portents: When the slave-girl gives birth to her mistress. That is one of its portents. When naked barefoot shepherds are the leaders of men. That too is one of its portents. And when goatherds compete in erecting tall buildings. That is one of its portents."

(4) In *ᶜIlal al-Sharāᵓiᶜ*, with a chain of narrators going back to Anas b. Mālik, we read a lengthy tradition in which the Prophet says to ᶜAbd Allāh b. Salām, who had asked him some questions:
As for the portents of the Hour—a fire that drives people from the East to the West.

Author's comments: Perhaps its meaning is unclear. The reports concerning the portents of the hour that have been narrated through Sunni

and Shiʿi chains are too numerous to count. At the end of the fifth volume of the present work, we discussed the narration of Salmān from the Prophet and that of Ḥumrān from al-Ṣādiq, which are two of the most comprehensive narrations on this topic.[1]

(5) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, the author has declared authentic a tradition going back to Ḥudhayfah b. al-Yamān:
I was a man who used to speak harshly to my family, so I said: "O Messenger of God! I am indeed fearful that my tongue will cast me into the Fire!"
And God's Messenger replied: "So why do you not seek God's forgiveness? I plead to God to forgive me a hundred times a day!"

(6) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is narrated from Aḥmad, Ibn Abī Shaybah, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, Nasāʾīm Ibn Ḥabbān, and Ibn Mardawayh from Agharr al-Manazī that the Messenger of God said:
It is a lapse of my heart, and verily I seek God's forgiveness a hundred times a day.

(7) In the same source, concerning the words *so may it not be that if you were to turn away…* (47:22), we read that Bayhaqī narrates from Jābir b. ʿAbd Allāh that God's Messenger said:
The womb (*raḥm*) is connected to God's Throne and it has a fluent tongue, with which it says: "O God! Join what I join and cut off what I cut off!"

Author's comments: There are many narrations about blood-relations, in keeping ties with them and mistreating them, and a selection of these has already been discussed in our commentary on the beginning of Sūrah al-Nisāʾ.

(8) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, concerning God's words:
Do they not contemplate the Qurʾan…? (47:24)—It is narrated from Abū ʿAbd Allāh and Abū al-Ḥasan [Imām al-Ṣādiq and Imām al-Kāẓim]: "Do they not contemplate the Qurʾan and discharge their duties?"

(9) In *Tawḥīd* with a chain of narrators going back to Muḥammad b. ʿAmārah:
I asked al-Ṣādiq, Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad: "O son of God's Messenger! Tell me about God, does He become pleased and displeased?"

1 See the section on narrations after the exegesis of 5:51–54. [Trans.]

He said: "Yes, but not in the way you find amongst the creatures. Rather God's anger is His punishment, and His pleasure is His reward."

(10) And in *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān*, it is narrated about the verse *Yet you will recognize them in their tone of speech* (47:30) from Abū Saᶜīd al-Khudrī:
The tone of speech some of them used about ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib… we knew the hypocrites during the time of God's Messenger by their hatred for ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.

(11) In *Majmaᶜ*, we are also told that a similar narration has been transmitted from Jābir b. ᶜAbd Allāh al-Anṣārī.

(12) And it is narrated that ᶜUbādah b. al-Ṣāmit said:
We used to test our children with the love of ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. So if we saw one of them did not love him, we knew that this was because he lacked good sense.

(13) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn Mardawayh relates from Ibn Masᶜūd:
We did not know the hypocrites during the time of God's Messenger except by their hatred of ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.

(14) In the *Amālī* of al-Ṭūsī, with a chain back to ᶜAlī:
There are four places in which God has confirmed me in His Book… a man is hidden beneath his tongue; he appears when he talks. So God sent down the verse *Yet you will recognize them in their tone of speech*.

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Verses 33–38

In the previous verses, God described the state of the faithless and added to this a description of the state of those in whose hearts there is a sickness, their reluctance to fight and the condition of those amongst them who apostatize. Now, God returns to the faithful to warn them against becoming like them, lest they parley with the idolaters, incline towards them, and follow that which displeases God and despise what pleases Him. If they do this, then their works will fail. And these verses admonish them with a mixture of encouragement and warning. This is how God concludes the sūrah.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَلَا تُبْطِلُوا أَعْمَالَكُمْ ﴿٣٣﴾

(47:33) ***O you who have faith! Obey God and obey the Messenger, and do not render your works void.***

It is possible to read this verse in isolation and to take its meaning as absolute. After all, jurists adduce the phrase *and do not render your works void* to prohibit invalidating one's prayer after commencing it. However, insofar as it is situated in the context of the verses we have already dealt with, it is actually dealing with the command to fight. Equally, the following verse, which also falls within this context, especially in its apparent meaning *Indeed those who are faithless…* (47:34) explains the rationale for this verse. And the following verse, *So do not slacken and call for peace…* (47:35), follows logically from these two. In short, the verse in its context denotes the obligation to obey God with regards to the scripture He reveals and the laws He lays down. It also denotes the obligation to obey the Messenger in that which he conveys from God and in the commands He issues insofar as he has authority over the believers in the religious community. Moreover, it warns the faithful against rendering their deeds null and void by doing that which causes their works to fail, something which afflicts those of weak faith who incline towards hypocrisy to the extent that some of them will apostatize after guidance has become clear to them!

So on the subject of obeying God, this means obeying God in the laws and commands He has sent down with regards to warfare; obeying

the Prophet means obeying him in what he conveys from God and the military preparations he orders based on his authority over the believers; rendering works void means holding back from the command to fight just as the hypocrites and apostates hold back.

It is said: "Rendering works void" means causing them to fail by acting as if by believing they have done some favor to God and His Messenger, as God says: *They count it as a favor to you that they have embraced Islam* (49:17).

It is said: Meaning through being conceited (*ʿujub*). It is also said: Through disbelief and hypocrisy.

It is said: It means invalidating the charities that they give through reproaches and affronts. *Do not render your charities void by reproaches and affronts* (2:264).

It is also said: Invalidating them by committing sins. Yet others say: Specifically by committing major sins.

All these interpretations are valid examples of instances where this verse might apply, assuming we put aside the context in which it is situated. But taking into account the context that we have already highlighted above, this verse is only concerned with the matter of fighting and therefore these opinions are rejected.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَصَدُّوا عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ مَاتُوا وَهُمْ كُفَّارٌ فَلَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ ﴿٣٤﴾

(47:34) ***Indeed those who are faithless and bar from the way of God and then die faithless, God will never forgive them.***

In the present context, this appears to explain the rationale for the contents of the previous verse. It indicates that if you do not obey God and His Messenger and you invalidate your works by following that which displeases God and loathing that which pleases Him, this will ultimately put you amongst the people who disbelieve and bar from the way of God, and there will never be any forgiveness for these people after they die.

To *bar from the way of God* means to turn aside from faith or to prevent other people from believing.

فَلَا تَهِنُوا وَتَدْعُوا إِلَى السَّلْمِ وَأَنْتُمُ الْأَعْلَوْنَ وَاللَّهُ مَعَكُمْ وَلَنْ يَتِرَكُمْ أَعْمَالَكُمْ ﴿٣٥﴾

(47:35) ***So do not slacken and call for peace when you have the upper hand, and God is with you, and He will not stint your works.***

This verse follows logically from those above; *slacken* is from *wahn*, meaning weakness or limpness; *and call for peace* is joined to *slacken* and falls within the frame of prohibition, in other words: "and do not *call for peace*." The sentence *when you have the upper hand* is a circumstantial qualifier, meaning: "do not do that while the reality is that *you have the upper hand*." To *have the upper hand* means to triumph, and this is a well-known figure of speech.

God is with you is joined to *when you have the upper hand*, expounding the reason why they have the upper hand. God's being with them means that Divine Assistance (*naṣr*) is with them rather than in the sense of sustaining them (*qayūmiyyah*), which is what is meant in the verse: *and He is with you wherever you may be* (57:4).

And He will not stint your works: In *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān*, it is said:

> To stint (*witr*) means to diminish or deprive, and an example of this can be found in the tradition "it is as though he stinted his folk and his wealth."[1] The original meaning of *witr* is to cut, such as the one who is denied compensation for a murdered relative, or the one who is cut-off from other people.

With this in mind, *stint* means: He will not diminish your deeds but give you their reward in full. It is said: It means He will not squander your deeds. It is also said: He will not wrong you. But these meanings are approximately the same.

And the verse as a whole means: "The path of not obeying God and His Messenger and voiding your works is this path; it leads to being deprived of God's forgiveness forever. So do not weaken or slacken in the matter of fighting, and do not try to make peace with the idolaters or cease hostilities while you have the upper hand. God is granting you His assistance against them and He will not deprive you of your rewards in the slightest; rather, He will recompense you in full.

This verse promises victory and success to the Muslims if they obey God and His Messenger, so it is like the other verse: *Do not weaken or grieve: you shall have the upper hand, should you be faithful* (3:139).

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1 The full tradition of the Prophet in *al-Jawāmiᶜ* reads: "Whoever misses the *ᶜaṣr* prayer, it is as though he has stinted his folk and wealth."

إِنَّمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا لَعِبٌ وَلَهْوٌ ۚ وَإِنْ تُؤْمِنُوا وَتَتَّقُوا يُؤْتِكُمْ أُجُورَكُمْ وَلَا يَسْأَلْكُمْ أَمْوَالَكُمْ ﴿٣٦﴾

(47:36) ***The life of the world is just play and diversion, but if you are faithful and Godwary, He will give you your rewards, and will not ask your wealth from you.***

This verse encourages them to desire the Hereafter and to abstain from this world by expounding its reality, namely that it is nothing more than play and diversion. And we have already discussed the sense in which it is play and diversion.

If you are faithful and Godwary—if you believe and are Godwary by obeying God and obeying His Messenger, then He will give you your rewards and He will not ask you for your wealth in return for what he gives you. The context suggests that the meaning of *wealth* is all of their wealth, and this is supported by the verse that follows.

إِنْ يَسْأَلْكُمُوهَا فَيُحْفِكُمْ تَبْخَلُوا وَيُخْرِجْ أَضْغَانَكُمْ ﴿٣٧﴾

(47:37) ***Should He ask it from you, and press you, you will be stingy, and He will expose your spite.***

To *press* someone means to put them under pressure. *Stingy*—as it is said—means to refuse to give something. *Spite* means hatred.

So this verse means: "If he asked you for all your wealth and demanded it from you in its entirety, you would have refused to give it to him because you love it, then the hatred in your hearts would come out and you would go astray."

هَا أَنْتُمْ هَؤُلَاءِ تُدْعَوْنَ لِتُنْفِقُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَمِنْكُمْ مَنْ يَبْخَلُ ۖ وَمَنْ يَبْخَلْ فَإِنَّمَا يَبْخَلُ عَنْ نَفْسِهِ ۚ وَاللَّهُ الْغَنِيُّ وَأَنْتُمُ الْفُقَرَاءُ ۚ وَإِنْ تَتَوَلَّوْا يَسْتَبْدِلْ قَوْمًا غَيْرَكُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَكُونُوا أَمْثَالَكُمْ ﴿٣٨﴾

(47:38) ***Ah! There you are, being invited to spend in the way of God; yet among you there are those who are stingy; and whoever is stingy is stingy only to himself. God is the All-sufficient, and you are all-needy, and if you turn away He will replace you with another people, and they will not be like you.***

This verse calls the audience to bear witness in order to explain the previous verse. It is as if to say: "If he asked you for all of your wealth and pressed you for it, you would be stingy. The proof for this is that you are called to spend only some of your wealth in the way of God and yet some of you are still stingy, so if he demanded all of your wealth then all of you would have been stingy!"

And whoever is stingy is stingy only to himself: In other words, he only withholds goodness from himself. After all, God does not ask them for what they have for His own sake, rather He asks for the benefit of those who spend as it contains what is best for them in this world and in the Hereafter. So when they refuse to spend, they actually refuse what is best for themselves. This is what God alludes to next, when He says: *God is the All-sufficient, and you are all-needy*. In other words: It is God who is all-sufficient, not you. And it is you who are needy, not God!

…and if you turn away He will replace you with another people, and they will not be like you: It is said: This is joined to the phrase: *…but if you are faithful and Godwary…* (47:36), and the meaning is: If you believe and are Godwary, He will give you your rewards. But if you turn away then He will replace you with another people by making them successful in attaining faith instead of you, and they will not be like you; they will believe, be Godwary, and spend in the way of God.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Thawāb al-Aʿmāl*, from Abū Jaʿfar [Imām al-Bāqir]:
God's Messenger said: "Whoever says '*subḥānallāh*', God will plant for him a tree in paradise. Whoever says '*alḥamdulillāh*', God will plant him a tree in paradise. Whoever says '*lā ilāha illā allāh*', God will plant him a tree in paradise. And whoever says '*allāhu akbar*', God will plant him a tree in paradise."
A man from the Quraysh said: "O Messenger of God! Our trees in paradise will indeed be many!"
He said: "Yes, but beware of sending a fire that will burn them! That is because God says: *O you who have faith! Obey God and obey the Messenger, and do not render your works void* (47:33)."

(2) And in *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, about the verse *And if they incline toward peace, then you incline toward it…* (8:61):
It is abrogated by God's words: *So do not slacken and call for peace when you have the upper hand, and God is with you*. (47:35)

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(3) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, ʿAbd al-Razzāq, ʿAbd b. Ḥamīd, Tirmidhī, Ibn Abī Hātim, Ṭabarānī in *al-Awsaṭ*, and Bayhaqī in *Dalāʾil* narrate from Abū Hurayrah:

God's Messenger recited the verse *…and if you turn away He will replace you with another people, and they will not be like you* (47:38).

The people said: "O Messenger of God! Who are these with whom God will replace us if we turn away?"

God's Messenger slapped the back of Salmān and said: "This one and his people, for by Him in whose hand is my soul, even if faith hung from the morning star, some men from Persia would attain it!"

And similar traditions have been narrated from Abū Hurayrah by other routes, and also by Ibn Mardawayh from Jābir.

(4) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, Abū Baṣīr narrates from Abū Jaʿfar [Imām al-Bāqir]:

If you turn away—O assembly of Arabs!—*He will replace you with another people*—meaning the non-Arabs (*mawālī*).

(5) And in the same work, from Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq]:

And God has certainly replaced them with [a people] better than them; the non-Arabs (*mawālī*).

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Chapter 48

Sūrah al-Fatḥ

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Verses 1-7

بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

The meanings of the verses of this sūrah in their different sections clearly apply to the account of the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah which took place in the seventh year of the *Hijrah* and the events that took place around this, with events such as the Bedouins recalcitrance, the idolaters' obstruction of the pilgrimage, and the pledge of allegiance given beneath the tree detailed in traditions. We shall discuss some of these in the study of the narrations below, God-willing.

The purpose of this sūrah is to expound the favor God has bestowed upon His messenger through the clear victory He granted him on this journey, and upon the faithful amongst those who accompanied him. It also serves to extol their virtue and promise a beauteous reward to those of them who believe and do righteous deeds. The sūrah is Medinan.

إِنَّا فَتَحۡنَا لَكَ فَتۡحٗا مُّبِينٗا ١

(48:1) ***Indeed We have inaugurated for you a clear victory.***

This statement is intended to extol a favor performed by God. The sentence is given emphasis by *indeed* (inna), the majestic plural *We* is attached to *inaugurated*, and the victory is described as *clear* is to call attention to the importance of the victory that is being extolled as God's favor.

Based on the contextual indicators, this victory (*fatḥ*) is the triumph God granted His Prophet in the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah.

This is because of the following: all of what we shall see in the verses extolling the favor God has shown to the Prophet and the faithful—those praising them and expressing God's satisfaction with the pledge of allegiance (*bayʿah*) and the promise of worldly rewards both in the short and long term, not to mention the promise of paradise in the Hereafter—and the blame laid upon the Bedouins who refused to accompany God's

Messenger when he called upon them, as well as the blame laid upon the idolaters for barring the Prophet and those with him, and the blame laid upon the hypocrites; and God's affirmation of the Prophet's vision and His own prophecy *and He assigned besides that a victory near at hand* (48:27), which is almost plain in its meaning. All of these meanings are connected with the Prophet setting off to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, which ultimately led to the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah.

It is obvious why this treaty is a clear victory given by God to His Prophet when we ponder on the tone of this sūrah's verses that give the account of it. The setting off of the Prophet and the faithful on this mission was extremely dangerous, and many did not expect them to return from it, as God alludes to in the verse *Rather you thought that the Messenger and the faithful would not ever return to their folk* (48:12). The idolaters, at whose head were the leaders of the Quraysh and their followers, were very powerful and implacably hostile to the Prophet and the faithful. For the last two years, nothing had been between these two groups except the sword, and they had only ever met on the battlefield in battles such as those of Uḥud, Badr and Aḥzāb. On this occasion only a small band accompanied the Prophet—one thousand four hundred in all—and they had no power against the mass of idolaters while the latter were on their home territory.

And yet, in spite of all this, God reversed the situation so that it went in favor of the Prophet and the faithful and against the idolaters. The idolaters agreed to something that no one could have ever hoped for, namely they asked the Prophet to sign a treating agreeing to a cessation of hostilities for ten years, with the guarantee that each of the two groups would respect the security of the other's followers and whoever joins them. Moreover, it was agreed that the Prophet would withdraw to Medina this year and return to Mecca next year, and the Quraysh agreed to give him unfettered access to the Sanctuary and the Kaʿbah for three days.

This is one of the clearest victories that God granted to His Prophet, and it was one of the immediate causes for the conquest of Mecca in the eighth year of the *Hijrah*, for a large number of idolaters had come to believe in Islam during the two years between the treaty and the conquest of Mecca. Khaybar and the area around it was captured at the beginning of the seventh year, and this strengthened the Muslims. In this time, Islam spread visibly, its followers became numerous, their renown spread far and wide, and they were active in many lands. When the Prophet set out

to take Mecca, he was in an army of ten or twelve thousand men, while at the treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah he had only one thousand four hundred according to most accounts.

It is said that the real meaning of "victory" (*fatḥ*) is the conquest of Mecca, so when God says *Indeed We have inaugurated for you a clear victory*, this means "We have decreed for you the conquest of Mecca." However the context of the verse does not support such a reading.

And it is said that it actually refers to the conquest of Khaybar and it means—assuming that this sūrah was revealed when the Prophet returned from Ḥudaybiyyah to Medina—"We have decreed for you the conquest of Khaybar." However, such a reading runs into the same problems as the one above.

And it is said that this refers to a moral victory (*fatḥ maʿnawī*), namely that the victory over the enemies by openly making the pilgrimage, the wonders and miracles which raised the word of truth over falsehood, and the triumph of Islam over all religions. Even if this reading is not in itself problematic, the flow of the verses does not match with it.

لِيَغْفِرَ لَكَ اللَّهُ مَا تَقَدَّمَ مِنْ ذَنْبِكَ وَمَا تَأَخَّرَ وَيُتِمَّ نِعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكَ
وَيَهْدِيَكَ صِرَاطًا مُسْتَقِيمًا ۝٢ وَيَنْصُرَكَ اللَّهُ نَصْرًا عَزِيزًا ۝٣

(48:2–3) ***That God may cover by removing*** **(lī yaghfira lak allāhu)** ***what is past of the evil consequence that they had against you*** **(dhanbika)** ***and what is to come, and that He may perfect His blessing upon you and guide you on a straight path, and God will help you with a mighty help.***

According to the apparent meaning of the text, *that* (li) signifies that what follows explains the wisdom behind this victory. So it appears that the purpose of this clear victory is to forgive what has passed of your *dhanb* (lit. "sin") and what is to come. However, there is obviously no connection between victory and the forgiveness of *dhanb* ("sin"), nor is there any intelligible sense in making forgiveness the reason for it.

In order to avoid this problem, some have said that the *lām* in *li yaghfira* is actually the *lām* of swearing an oath (*lām al-qasam*), such that the real construction of the Arabic is *li yaghfiranna* but the *nūn* of emphasis was omitted. The *fatḥah* was left at the end of the word (rather than a *ḍammah*) to signify this omitted suffix. However this is completely wrong,

and there is no corroborating evidence for this sort of construction in classical Arabic.

The same applies to the claim employed by some to avoid this problem, namely: "The wisdom for this victory is forgiveness as a whole and everything associated with it, such as the completion of God's blessings, guidance and assistance. Therefore, there is no contradiction entailed by the fact that some of this—namely forgiveness of sins—does not feature as a direct reason for the victory." This is a foolish statement that does not solve anything. If the forgiveness of *dhanb* ("sin") is not a reason, whether in whole or part, for the victory, nor has any kind of connection whatsoever to anything associated with it, then God would not mention it as a reason for it, whether by itself or with anything else!

In short, this semantic problem is the best indicator that the meaning of *sin* (dhanb) in this verse is not the commonly-understood meaning, namely disobeying the command of one's master, nor does *forgive* (maghfirah) mean what it is commonly understood to mean, namely to forgo punishing someone for the aforementioned disobedience. The original meaning of *dhanb* in Arabic, according to what we can glean from its usage, is an action that has any kind of evil consequences. Meanwhile, *maghfirah* signifies the covering of something. As for the two commonly-understood meanings that come to our minds when we hear these words today, meaning disobeying one's master and forgoing the punishment of disobedience, these meanings originate in the religious usage (*ʿurf al-mutasharriʿīn*) of these terms.

The Prophet rose up to call people to the truth and resist faithlessness and idolatry before the *Hijrah*, and he continued on this path, fighting countless battles with the faithless and the idolaters, after the *Hijrah*. All of this had a negative effect on the idolaters and the faithless, and they would have never forgiven him for that so long as they had power and strength; they would never forget the passing away of their religion and the destruction of their way of life, nor the killing of their leaders in battle. Not unless they quenched the rancor in their hearts by taking revenge on him, wiping out his name and destroying everything he worked for. But God granted him this victory, which is the capture of Mecca and the victory of Ḥudaybiyyah which led to it. This deprived them of their power and extinguished their fires, and therefore it deprived them of their means against him which was a *dhanb* (in the sense of "evil consequence") and protected him from them.

So the meaning of *dhanb*—and God knows best—is the evil consequences that resulted from his invitation to the faithless and the idolaters; it was an evil consequence that they had against him. This is exactly like when Moses told his Lord: *Also they have a charge (*dhanb*) against me, and I fear they will kill me* (62:14). So *what is past of your* ***dhanb*** means that which was from him in Mecca before the *Hijrah*, while *what is to come* is what came from him after the *Hijrah*. God's forgiveness of this *dhanb* is to cover it by removing its evil consequences, depriving them of their power and destroying their foundations. This reading is supported by the phrases: *…and that He may perfect His blessing upon you…* (48:2) and *and God will help you with a mighty help* (48:3).

And commentators have other schools of thought with regards to this verse, including:

Those who say that *dhanb* ("sin") refers to actual sins committed by the Prophet; so *what is past of your dhanb (*"sin"*) and what is to come* refers to that which occurred before he was made a prophet and afterwards. And it is said: It refers to that which came before the victory and that which came after.

However, this reading is based on the assumption that sins can be ascribed to the Prophets and this is contrary to what is unequivocally stated by the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and human reason about the infallibility (*ʿiṣmah*) of the Prophets. And we have already discussed this in the second part of this work and elsewhere.

Moreover, even if we accept this reading, it still does not explain the connection between the victory and forgiveness.

Another view is that forgiveness for *what is past of your dhanb (*"sin"*) and what is to come* means the sins he commits. *What is to come* constitutes a promise to forgive whatever future sins he commits, or else one could object that forgiveness for something that has not happened yet is meaningless.

However, in addition to what we have already said concerning the previous view, the problem here is that promising to forgive his future sins before they happen entails the lifting of all moral duties from him. And this is rebutted by God's explicit statements in many verses. For example: *Indeed We have sent down the Book to you with the truth; so worship God, putting exclusive faith in Him.* (39:2) and *…and I have been commanded to be the first of those who submit* (39:12). And there are many other verses like these whose context means that they cannot be restricted to one

situation only.

Bear in mind that the category "sins" includes such things as idolatry (*shirk*), ascribing falsehoods to God, deriding God's signs, causing corruption in the earth, and violating what God has sanctified. Now, if we say that God has forgiven all of his future sins, this includes these sins. It makes no sense for God to send a servant to establish His religion firmly and reform the world and then, once He has assisted him, granted him victory and made him triumphant, permit him to violate His commands, destroy what He has built, and corrupt what He has reformed by forgiving every sin he will commit and absolving him for whatever lies he might speak about God, when his purpose is to convey God's message and God has said: *Had he faked any sayings in Our name, We would have surely seized him by the right hand and then cut off his aorta…* (69:44–46).

Another opinion is the claim by some that forging *what is past of your dhanb (*"sin"*)* means forgiving the sins of his forefathers, Adam and Eve, because of his blessings, *and what is to come* means forgiving the sins of his community because of his supplication. However, the same criticisms apply here also.

Another opinion still is that the verse has an implicit meaning, in spite of the context suggesting otherwise, namely: "So that God may forgive your sins, past and present, if you had any sins." However, this reading goes against the apparent meaning of the text without any evidence.

Yet another opinion is that this statement is uttered in magnification while observing a pleasant form of address, meaning: "God forgives you" as when God says: *May God excuse you! Why did you grant them leave…*? (9:43) However, when using this kind of address, it is normally phrased in the form of a supplication, as we see in the example given.

Another opinion is that when the word *dhanb* ("sin") is applied to the Prophet, it not doing what is most appropriate (*tark al-awlā*) or contravening pragmatic directives (*awāmir irshādyyah*) rather than disobeying one's master. And based on their different degrees of proximity to the divine, the Prophets are held to account for not doing what is most appropriate in the same way that others are held to account for everyday sins. It is famously said: "The good deeds of the righteous are the sins of those brought near" (*ḥasanāt al-abrār sayyiʾāt al-muqarrabīn*).

Still another opinion which a number of our colleagues have preferred is that forgiving *what is past of your* dhanb *("sin") and what is to come* means forgiving the sins of his community, both past and future, through

his intercession (*shafāʿah*). And the reason why the sin is ascribed to him is because of his connection to his community which is the cause of this forgiveness.

Both this interpretation and the one before it are safe from the general objections we have raised above, but they still do not address the lack of an obvious connection between victory and forgiveness.

The opinion of Sharīf al-Murtaḍā is that the Arabic word *dhanb* is a verbal noun (*maṣdar*) and a verbal noun can be attributed to either the subject (*fāʿil*) or object (*mafʿūl*) of the action. In this case it has been attributed to the object of its action and it means "*what is past* of their sin towards you by expelling you from Mecca and barring you from the Holy Sanctuary" in which case forgiveness means to expunge and abrogate the rules of his enemies amongst the idolaters. In other words, "God will expunge that from you and blot out its disgrace with the victory He will grant you [victory] over Mecca when you enter it in future."

From one angle this reading is close to what we have presented above, and it would not be problematic save for the fact it goes against the apparent meaning of the verse slightly.

In the words *that God may forgive you* which follow the words *Indeed We have inaugurated for you a clear victory*, there is a transition from speech in the first-person plural to the third-person. Perhaps the reason for this is that the over-arching theme of this sūrah is God enumerating the blessings which He has bestowed upon His prophet and the faithful by granting them victory, sending down tranquillity and giving them His assistance, as well as everything else He promises them here. In this case, it is most appropriate for the tone of the sūrah to be in the third-person. This is so God is mentioned by name and His assistance is ascribed directly to Him and contrasts the fact that the Prophet and the faithful worship Him alone while the idolaters do not worship Him but worship their false deities instead, seeking their assistance. But their deities will not assist them.

As for speaking in the first-person plural in the first verse, this alludes to God's majesty. This is appropriate to the mention of victory in that verse. The same is true of the words *Indeed We have sent you as a witness…* (48:8).

…and that He may perfect His blessing upon you…: It is said: Meaning to perfect it for you in this world by giving you supremacy over your enemies, elevating your cause and establishing your religion, and in the Hereafter by raising your level. And it is said: Meaning to perfect it for

you by giving you victories over Khaybar, Mecca, and Ṭāʾif.

…and guide you on a straight path…: It is said: To steady you upon the path which takes the one who walks upon it to paradise. And it is said: Meaning He will guide you to the upright path in promulgating the divine laws and applying God's limits.

…and God will help you with a mighty help: It is said: *A mighty help* means one which will drive back every obstinate tyrant and disobedient rebel. God did this for His Prophet by making his religion the mightiest religion, and his authority the greatest authority. And it is said: *A mighty help* means a kind of help which is extremely rare, and God provided this to His Prophet, as is obvious when you compare his condition at the outset of his mission to his condition in its final days.

When we ponder on the tone of these two verses in light of the meaning we discussed for the words *Indeed We have inaugurated for you a clear victory, that God may forgive you what is past of your sin and what is to come…*, it would seem to suggest that when God says *and that He may perfect His blessing upon you* He means He will prepare the ground to perfect the word of truth and purify the environment in order to grant him *a mighty help*. This is after removing the impediments to this by effacing the negative consequences of the Prophet's mission before and after the *Hijrah*.

…and guide you on a straight path means that once He has purified the environment for his Prophet, He will guide him to a course of action that will achieve his goals. This refers to the path the Prophet followed after his return from Ḥudaybiyyah, when he conquered Khaybar and the authority of Islam spread throughout the different regions of the Arabian Peninsula, culminating in the conquest of Mecca and Ṭāʾif.

…and God will help you with a mighty help means He will grant him the kind of manifest assistance, the like of which is rarely or never witnessed. This promise was realized when He gave him victory over Mecca and Ṭāʾif and Islam spread across the lands of the Arabian Peninsula; idolatry was uprooted, the Jews were subdued and the Christians of the Peninsula submitted to him, as did the Zoroastrians who inhabited it. God completed people's religion for them, perfected His blessing upon them and chose for them Islam as their religion.

هُوَ الَّذِى أَنْزَلَ السَّكِينَةَ فِى قُلُوبِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ لِيَزْدَادُوا إِيمَانًا مَعَ إِيمَانِهِمْ ۗ
وَلِلَّهِ جُنُودُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا ﴿٤﴾

(48:4) *It is He who sent down composure into the hearts of the faithful that they might enhance their faith. To God belong the hosts of the heavens and the earth and God is almighty, all-wise.*

The apparent meaning of *composure* (sakīnah[1]) is a calm steady tranquillity of the soul towards that in which it has believed. Hence why God explains the reason for sending it down as *that they might enhance their faith.* We have already discussed the concept of composure in our commentary on the verse *the Ark will come to you, bearing tranquillity from your Lord* (2:248) in the second part of this work. There, we said this refers to the spirit of faith which God mentions in the verse *and strengthened them with a spirit from Him* (58:22).

It is said: *Composure* is mercy (*raḥmah*). And: It is intellect (*ʿaql*). And also: Gravity and virtuousness for God and His Messenger. And: Inclining to that which the Prophet has brought. And furthermore: An angel that dwells within the believer's heart. And it is said: Something with a head like that of a cat. But none of these opinions we have mentioned have the slightest evidence for these claims.

When God says He sends down composure into the hearts of the faithful, this means He creates it in their hearts while it had not been there previously. The Qur'an often uses "sending down" (*inzāl*) to express the idea of creation or origination, such as when God says *and He has sent down for you eight mates of the cattle* (39:6), and when He says *and We sent down iron* (57:25); and *There is not a thing but that its sources are with Us, and We do not send it down except in a known measure.* (15:21). And the Qur'an only describes the act of creation and origination as a "sending down" to allude to the loftiness of its source.

It is said: The meaning of "sending down" is "to make still" (*iskān*) and "to settle" (*iqrār*) based on their saying: "He set down in such a place" meaning that he set down his mount there and dismounted. However this sense of the word is not found in God's speech despite the frequency with which He uses it. Perhaps the reason why some choose this meaning is because the word is made transitive in the present verse by the preposition *into* (fī)—*sent down composure into the hearts of the faithful*—but the central concern we observe in this discourse is that the composure becomes connected to their hearts in which a way that it abides in them, just as we

1 This can also be translated as "tranquility". [Pub.]

observe that its connection is one of descending upon them from high above in the verses *so He sent down composure on them* (48:18) and *God sent down His composure upon His Messenger and upon the faithful* (48:26).

Enhancing faith means strengthening it; faith (*īmān*) in something means having knowledge (*ʿilm*) of it and adhering (*iltizām*) to the practical implications of this. Obviously both knowledge and adherence can become stronger or weaker by themselves, so faith—which is knowledge accompanied by adherence—can also become stronger or weaker.

So this verse means that it is God who put steadfastness and tranquillity, which is the corollary of one of the levels of the spirit, in hearts of the faithful, in order to strengthen the faith that they had before He sent down this composure. Thus the faith becomes more complete than it was before.

A Discussion on Faith and its Enhancement

To have faith in something is not merely acquiring some knowledge of it. This is something we can conclude from verses such as:

> *Indeed those who turned their backs after the guidance had become clear to them….* (47:25)
>
> *Indeed those who are faithless and bar from the way of God and defy the Messenger after guidance has become clear to them….* (47:32)
>
> *They impugned them—though they were convinced in their hearts….* (27:14)
>
> *…and whom God has led astray knowingly….* (45:23)

As you can see, these verses affirm the possibility of apostasy, disbelief, obstinacy and going astray in spite of knowledge.

So just knowing something and being convinced that it is true is not sufficient to produce faith or to become imbued with the qualities that result from it. Rather, one must observe its practical implications and set one's heart upon fulfilling these such that it has real outcomes, even if only in a general sense. So someone who comes to know that there is no god except God and then follows its practical implications, namely being His servant and worshipping Him alone—such a person can be called faithful. However if someone knows this but does not put it into practice and does not do anything to demonstrate his servanthood, then he has knowledge but he cannot be said to have faith.

This demonstrates the falsity of the claim that faith is nothing more than knowledge and assent, and that is because—as we have

seen—knowledge can co-exist with disbelief (*kufr*).

It also proves false the claim that faith is only deeds, because deeds can co-exist with hypocrisy (*nifāq*); a hypocrite (*munāfiq*) is someone who performs good deeds and perhaps even has knowledge of the truth, and yet he does not have faith.

Insofar as faith is knowledge of something, accompanied by a commitment to its practical implications resulting in the knower taking action, and insofar as both knowledge and commitment can increase or decrease and strengthen or weaken, then faith—which is a combination of the two—can also be subject to increase or decrease and strengthening or weakening. Therefore, that faith has different degrees and levels is a necessary truth which is beyond doubt.

This is the opinion of most scholars, and it is the truth. In scriptural evidence (*naql*), it is supported by God's words, *that they might enhance their faith* and other verses of the Qur'an. There are also numerous narrations that have been transmitted from the Imāms of the Prophet's Household which indicate that faith has numerous levels.

However, some scholars, such as Abū Ḥanīfah, al-Juwaynī and others, have said that faith does not increase or decrease, arguing that because faith is what we call assent (*taṣdīq*) at the level of absolute certainty (*yaqīn*), it is not something that can conceivably increase or decrease. So, if someone believes, whether he does good deeds or sins, his belief stays the same—it never changes.

These scholars interpret the verses suggesting that faith can increase or decrease by saying that faith is an accidental quality (*ʿaraḍ*) that does not abide by itself, but rather through the renewal of its bearers [moment after moment].[1] This means it can be described as increasing or decreasing based on the duration and continuity with which it inheres in its bearers. So, for example, in the case of the Prophet it endured perpetually and

1 This understanding is based on the atomism of the Ashʿarite theologians; they asserted that every being was made up of atoms (indivisible particles, not to be confused with the atoms of modern science), which were the bearers of accidents (qualities, such as colour, which could not exist independently of them). These atoms and the qualities they possessed were constantly being renewed moment after moment. Therefore, because they say that faith is a binary (that is, "on-off") quality, its strength or weakness must be measured by the frequency of its occurrence in a being, based on its renewal in that being moment after moment. [Trans.]

without interruption, while in other persons it did so with a few interruptions or even many. With this in mind, they say that the meaning of faith increasing is that the parts or instances of faith follow successively in time without any gaps between them, or with very few gaps.

Faith can also increase as the number of things a person believes in increases. The ordinances of the religion were revealed gradually, and the faithful believed in whatever came down to them. This meant that the number of laws increased with the passage of time, so their faith also increased gradually. In other words, faith increasing or decreasing does not refer to its quality but to its quantity.

This is clearly weak, however. As for the first argument, that faith (*īmān*) as a word refers to assent that reaches the level of absolute certainty, this is not accepted. Faith as a word refers to certainty accompanied by adhering to its practical corollaries, as we have already discussed. Unless of course by "assent" (*taṣdīq*) they are referring to knowledge that is accompanied by adherence.

As for the second argument, namely that assent does not increase or decrease, this is a claim given without evidence. In fact, this is begging the question (*muṣādirah ʿalā al-maṭlūb*). Basing this claim on the assertion that faith is an accidental quality and that accidents inhere in their exemplars avails them nothing; faith can be of the kind that storms will not shake or it can be of the kind that will vanish at the slightest excuse or the faintest doubt. This qualitative difference in faith cannot be explained by merely the renewal of its exemplars or by the sparsity of its interruptions or the abundance thereof; it can only be explained based on the idea that faith can be of different degrees of intensity, whether we accept this theory of exemplars or not.

This is in addition to falsity of the theory that the exemplars of accidents are perpetually renewed (*tajaddud al-amthāl*), as has been explained in its proper place.

We must also reject their claim that whether you add good deeds or sins to the believer, this does not affect his condition in the slightest. This is because the idea that faith is strengthened through persistence in good deeds or weakened as a result of sins is something which cannot be doubted. After all, the strength or weakness of the effect (that is, a person's deeds) reveals the strength or weakness of its cause (that is, their faith). God says in the Qur'an: *To Him ascends the good word, and righteous conduct elevates it* (35:10) and *Then the fate of those who committed misdeeds*

was that they denied the signs of God and they used to deride them (30:10).

Regarding the two alternative interpretations they offer, the first entails that a person whose faith is incomplete—namely someone who has spaces in his heart that lack pieces of faith—be both a believer and a disbeliever in reality according to them, something for which we can find no support in God's words.

As for the verse *And most of them do not believe in God without ascribing partners to Him* (12:106), its meaning is closer to the theory that faith can increase or decrease than to the theory that says it cannot. After all, it signifies that they are faithful while at the same time they associate partners with God, so their faith is faith relative to pure idolatry, but it is also idolatry relative to pure faith. This implies that faith can increase or decrease!

The second of their interpretations suggests that faith only increases or multiplies with an increase in the quantity of things which a person has faith in, namely the laws and ordinances that are sent down by God. This makes it an attribute of faith that is relates to its object, and the reason why faith is given this attribute is because of its object. But if this was the meaning of the verse *that they might enhance their faith* then it would be more appropriate to make this the goal behind sending down an abundance of laws, rather than sending down composure upon the hearts of the faithful!

Some have argued that the enhancement of faith mentioned in the verse refers to an increase in its effects, namely the light which shines out from it upon the heart. However, an increase in the strength of the effect depends upon an increase in the strength its cause, so it makes no sense to give priority to one of two matters which are absolutely equal in all respects.

Others have suggested that the faith which is being "enhanced upon" is the innate faith (*īmān fiṭrī*), while the faith which is "enhancing" it is logically-based faith (*īmān istidlālī*). In other words: "To enhance their innate faith with logically-based faith." However, this is a claim made without any evidence, as innate faith is also logically-based; the object of knowledge and faith is always theoretical (*naẓarī*) in nature, not self-evident (*badīhī*).

Others still, including Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, have said: The debate about whether or not faith can increase or decrease is based on a semantic disagreement. Those who say it cannot mean that the core of faith (*aṣl*

al-īmān), namely assent, cannot increase or decrease, which is true. On the other hand, those who say it can mean that the perfection of faith (*kamāl al-īmān*), namely good deeds, can increase or decrease, which is also true without doubt.

To this, we must respond that, first of all: this confuses assent (*taṣdīq*) with faith (*īmān*), while we have said that faith is assent coupled with adherence to its practical implications, not merely assent by itself. Secondly: claiming those who say faith can increase or decrease accept that this does not refer to the core of faith is not correct. They actually affirm exactly that because they believe that both knowledge and adherence, the constituents of faith, can become stronger or weaker. Thirdly: bringing deeds into the equation is also not correct; the debate is not about the effects of faith, which are its perfection, as no one disputes that a person's good deeds can become many or few—after all, this is merely the repetition of a discrete entity (*tikrār al-wāḥid*)!

Commentary continues:

To God belong the hosts of the heavens and the earth: A *host* (jund) refers to a heavy mass of people united in working towards a common purpose. This is why it is used to describe soldiers amassed by order of their commander. The context indicates that *the hosts of the heavens and the earth* refers to the immediate causes (*asbāb*) that exist in the world, of both the visible creation and the invisible creation. These are the intermediaries interposed between God and between the object of the Divine Will; they always obey Him and never disobey Him.

Bringing this sentence (*To God belong…*) after *It is He who sent down composure…* shows that all the causes and means that exist are in His hands; He can make whatever He wishes reach whatever He wishes, and there is nothing that can resist Him when He does. Here, this power is attributed to enhancing the faith of the faithful by sending down composure upon their hearts.

…and God is almighty, all-wise: This means that God is supremely powerful, such that nothing can overcome Him, and adept at what He does; He does nothing save what His wisdom decrees. This sentence expounds the rationale for the sentence before it (*To God belong the hosts…*), and the sentence before it expounds the rationale for *It is He who sent down composure….* It is as if to say: He sent down composure for this reason, and this is because He possesses all the hosts and means, which is because

He is absolutely powerful and absolutely wise.

لِيُدْخِلَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَيُكَفِّرَ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ ۚ وَكَانَ ذَٰلِكَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ فَوْزًا عَظِيمًا ۝٥

(48:5) ***That He may admit*** **(li yudkhila)** ***the faithful, men and women, into gardens with streams running in them, to remain therein, and that He may absolve them of their misdeeds. That is a great success with God.***

This verse expounds yet another rationale for the one before it (*It is He who sent down composure…*) in meaning, just as His words *…that they might enhance their faith…* expounded it with regards to words. As if to say: "The faithful have been singled out for receiving composure to the exclusion of all others. This is to enhance their faith, the reality of which is that these persons will enter paradise while those others will be punished." With this in mind, the phrase *That He may admit…* is in permutation or an explanatory conjunction with the above phrase, *…that they might enhance their faith*.

Concerning the object of the *lām* in *that He may admit…* (li yudkhila) there are other opinions. For instance, one reading says it is *Indeed We have inaugurated…* (48:1), another says it is *that they might enhance…* (48:4), while another still says that it is everything that has come so far. And there are other readings too which we have not seen fit to mention.

Mentioning the faithful *men and women* together in the verse is the dispel the notion that paradise and the absolution of misdeeds are only for the menfolk because the verse occurs in the context of *jihād*, and *jihād* and victory usually are accomplished by the hands of men. Hence *women* are specifically mentioned here to dispel this notion, as was said.

Then *to remain therein* and *that He may absolve them of their misdeeds* refers to both the faithful men and women.

That is a great success with God—meaning that this is true happiness in which there is no doubt because it is with God and God speaks the truth.

وَيُعَذِّبَ الْمُنَافِقِينَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ وَالْمُشْرِكَاتِ الظَّانِّينَ بِاللَّهِ ظَنَّ السَّوْءِ ۚ عَلَيْهِمْ دَائِرَةُ السَّوْءِ ۖ وَغَضِبَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَنَهُمْ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُمْ جَهَنَّمَ ۖ وَسَاءَتْ مَصِيرًا ۝٦

(48:6) ***And punish the hypocrites, men and women, and the polytheists, men and women, who entertain a bad opinion of God. For them shall be an adverse turn of fortune: God is wrathful with them and He has cursed them, and prepared for them hell, and it is an evil destination.***

This is connected to the beginning of the previous verse, *That He may admit…* and the reason why God mentions the hypocrites before the polytheists is because the former are more harmful to the Muslims than the latter and their punishment is more severe, as God says: *Indeed the hypocrites will be in the lowest reach of the Fire* (4:145).

…who entertain a bad opinion of God: They hold a bad opinion of God because they believe that He will not assist His Messenger. It is said: *a bad opinion of God* includes that and all other negative opinions about God, such as idolatry and disbelief.

For them shall be an adverse turn of fortune…: This is either an invocation against them or an edict against them, meaning they will suffer an adverse turn of fortune which will afflict whoever it afflicts with death and destruction.

God is wrathful with them and He has cursed them…: This is connected to His saying *For them shall be an adverse turn…*—and *it is an evil destination* expounds the evilness of their destination in contrast to *That is a great success with God*, which expounds the pleasant destination for the people of faith.

وَلِلَّهِ جُنُودُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا ﴿٧﴾

(48:7) ***To God belong the hosts of the heavens and the earth, and God is all-mighty, all-wise.***

This has the same meaning as we discussed above, and it appears to explain the rationale of both the verses it follows—From *That He may admit the faithful, men and women…* to *…and prepared for them hell…*—in the same way as we explained above for the verse "It is He who sent down composure into the hearts of the faithful…."

It is also said: The meaning of this verse is to threaten them by reminding them that they are within the grasp of His power and He will exact retribution upon them. However, the first explanation is closer to the apparent meaning of the text.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, concerning the verse *Indeed We have inaugurated for you a clear victory*, it is narrated from Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, from Ibn Sinān, from Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq]:

The occasion for this verse's revelation and this great victory was that God had commanded His Messenger in a dream to enter the Holy Sanctuary, perform circumambulation, and shave with those who shave. So he told His Companions and bid them to set off, so they set off.

And when they reached Dhū al-Ḥulayfah, they put on the *iḥrām* for ʿUmrah and drove forth the sacrificial camels—and God's Messenger drove forth sixty-six camels—and they put on their *iḥrām* and began chanting *labbayk* for ʿUmrah. And those of them who drove forth sacrificial animals drove forth camels with and without covers.

When word of this reached the Quraysh, they dispatched Khālid b. al-Walīd with two hundred horsemen to ambush God's Messenger. He encountered him in the mountains. At one point, the time came for *ẓuhr* prayers. Bilāl recited the *adhān* and God's Messenger prayed with the people. Khālid said: "If we attack them while they are praying, we will have them because they will not break their prayers. Another prayer will be coming soon that is dearer to them than the lights of their eyes. When they begin their prayers, we will launch our attack!" It was then that Gabriel came down to God's Messenger with the prayer of fear in the verse *When you are among them, leading them in prayers…* (4:102).

Then, when it was the second day, God's Messenger set down at Ḥudaybiyyah, and he had been summoning the Bedouins he met on his route to come with them, but none had followed him. They had said: "Do Muḥammad and his companions hope to enter the Sanctuary while the Quraysh will surely attack them in the streets and slaughter them? Surely Muḥammad and his companions will never return to Medina!"

(2) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, Ibn ʿAbbās says:

God's Messenger set off towards Mecca. When he reached Ḥudaybiyyah, his camel stopped. He struck it but it would not move forward; then it knelt down. His companions said: "What

an obstinate camel!" He said: "This is not her habit. She has been restrained by He who restrained the Elephant (*ḥabasahā ḥābis al-fīl*)!"[1]

The Prophet called ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb to send him to Mecca, to ask them to let him enter Mecca, remove his *iḥrām* and slaughter his sacrificial animal. He said: "O Messenger of God! I have no friends there and I fear that the Quraysh will kill me because of my great hostility towards them. But I will tell you who is nobler than me: ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān!"

He said: "Spoken truly."

So God's Messenger called ʿUthmān and sent him to Abū Sufyān and the leaders of the Quraysh to inform them that he had not come to make war but rather had come to visit the Kaʿbah and pay his respects to its sanctity. But the Quraysh detained ʿUthmān there, and word reached God's Messenger that ʿUthmān had been killed, so he said: "We will not leave until we fight them." So he called the people to pledge allegiance; the Prophet stood under a tree and rested against it, and the people pledged allegiance to fight the idolaters and not to flee. ʿAbd Allāh b. Mughfil said: "I stood above the head of God's Messenger on that day and held a branch of the umbrella thorn tree above his head while he received the pledge of allegiance from people. He did not have them pledge to die, only to not run away."

Al-Zuhrī, ʿUrwah b. al-Zubayr, and Miswar b. Makhramah say: God's Messenger set out from Medina with a little over a thousand over his companions until they reached Dhū al-Ḥulayfah. There, God's Messenger adorned and marked the sacrificial animals and put on his *iḥrām* for ʿUmrah. Ahead of him, he sent a scout from the Khuzāʿah to inform him of the movements of the Quraysh. God's Messenger travelled until they reached Ghadīr al-Ashṭāṭ close to ʿAsfān. There, the scout from the Khuzāʿah tribe told him: "I left Kaʿb b. Luʾayy and ʿĀmir b. Luʾayy, and they had amassed a large contingent of Ethiopians against you. They will fight you and bar you from the Sanctuary." He responded: "Keep going." So they continued until they reached a fork in the road when the

1 This is an allusion to the story of Abraha and the army of the Elephant. [Trans.]

Prophet said: "Khālid b. al-Walīd is in Ghamīm with a vanguard of cavalry from the Quraysh. So take the right-hand route."
Then they continued until they reached Thunayyah. There, the Prophet's camel knelt and he said: "Qaswāʾ is not being stubborn; rather, she has been restrained by He who restrained the Elephant (*ḥabasahā ḥābis al-fīl*)!" Then he said: "No, by God! They do not ask me the way in which they might magnify the things God has sanctified except that I give it to them!" Then he struck her and she got up with him.
Then he turned aside until they reached the farthest part of Ḥudaybiyyah at a basin with little water that people would only sip from.
While they were in this condition, Badīl b. Warqāʾ al-Khuzāʿī came to them—in a band of the Khuzāʿah—and they were faithful friends from the people of Tihāmah who advised God's Messenger. He said: "I left Kaʿb b. Luʾayy and ʿĀmir b. Luʾayy—and they have foals and dams with them—and they will fight you and block your way to the Sanctuary."
God's Messenger said: "We have not come to fight anyone. We have come to perform ʿUmrah. War has exhausted the Quraysh and harmed them. If they wish, I will give them respite and they will not prevent me from preaching to the people. Then, if they wish to enter what the people have entered, they can, or else they have at least rested. But if they refuse, then by God I will fight them for this cause of mine, until I am killed or until God sees through His affair!"
Badīl told him: "I will convey your words to them."
So they went until they came to the Quraysh and said: "We have come to you from this person, and he says such-and-such."
ʿUrwah b. Masʿūd al-Thaqafī stood up and said: "He has offered you a sensible proposal. You should accept it! Let me go to him."
They said: "Go to him."
He went to the Prophet and spoke to him, and God's Messenger told him the likes of what he told to Badīl. Then ʿUrwah said: "O Muḥammad, do you want to wipe out your own people? Have you ever heard of an Arab striking at his root before you? And if not, by God I see nobles, and I see mongrels worthy of fleeing and leaving you."

Abū Bakr said to him: "Suck on the clitoris of Lāt! Shall we flee from him and leave him?"
He asked: "Who is that?"
They said: "Abū Bakr."
He said: "By He in whose hand is my soul, were it not for the fact that you did me a favor which I have not repaid, I would have answered you."
He began speaking to the Prophet, and whenever he addressed him, he seized his beard, while Mughīrah b. Shuʿbah stood above the head of the Prophet holding a sword and wearing a mail coif. Every time ʿUrwah reached to grab the beard of the Prophet, Mughīrah hit his hand with the lower-end of his scabbard and said: "Take your hand away from the beard of God's Messenger or else you won't be getting it back!"
He asked: "Who is that?"
Mughīrah replied, "Mughīrah bin Shuʿbah!"
ʿUrwah said: "O treason! Am I not trying to rectify your treachery?"
[He said this because] Mughīrah b. Shuʿbah had travelled with a group of people in the days before Islam, before killing them, taking their money and becoming a Muslim. When this happened, the Prophet had said: "As for your submission, we accept it. As for the money, it is the money of treachery and we have no need of it."
Then ʿUrwah began to observe the companions of the Prophet, how they would hasten to do whatever the Prophet bid them; whenever he performed ablutions they would fight one another to bring him water; when they spoke to him they would lower their voices and they would not meet his gaze out of reverence for him. So ʿUrwah went back to his comrades and said: "O people! By God I have met kings—Caesar, Khusraw and the Negus—but by God I have never seen a king revered by his comrades as Muḥammad's companions revere him! If he bids them do something, they hasten to it. If he performs ablutions, they fight one another for the water he used. When they speak to him, they lower their voices and they do not look sharply at him out of respect. He has offered you a sensible proposal, so accept it!"
A man from the Kinānah tribe said: "Let me go to him!" And they said: "Go to him!"

So when he came into view, God's Messenger said: "This is so-and-so, and he is from a people who respect the sacrificial animals. So send them!" So they sent them and met him with a group of people chanting the slogans of pilgrimage. When he saw that, he said: "Glory to God! These people should not be barred from the Sanctuary!"

Then a man called Mukarriz b. Ḥafṣ stood up and said: "Let me go to him!" And they said: "Go to him!"

When he came into view, the Prophet said: "This is Mukarriz, and he is a profligate man."

So while he was speaking to the Prophet, Suhayl b. ʿAmr came and the Prophet said: "Your affair has become easy for you!" So he said: "Write a treaty between us and you."

God's Messenger called for ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and told him: "Write *In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*…."

Suhayl interjected: "Who is this *Compassionate One (al-Raḥmān*)? I do not know him! Write 'In your name, O God!'"

The Muslims said: "By God we will not write anything besides *In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*."

The Prophet said: "Write *In your name, O God. This is what Muḥammad the Messenger of God decrees*…."

Suhayl interrupted: "By God, if we thought you were God's Messenger, we would not have prevented you from entering the Sanctuary, nor would we have fought you. Instead, write: 'Muḥammad son of ʿAbd Allāh.'"

The Prophet said: "I am the Messenger of God, even if you don't believe me." He turned to ʿAlī and said: "Erase 'the Messenger of God.'"

ʿAlī said: "O Messenger of God! My hand will not move to erase prophecy from your name."

So the Messenger of God took it and erased it, then said: "Write *what Muḥammad son of ʿAbd Allāh decrees with Suhayl b. ʿAmr*…. They have agreed to suspend hostilities for ten years, in which people will be safe and will not fight one another, and that any of Muḥammad's followers who perform the Ḥajj or ʿUmrah pilgrimages to Mecca to seek God's grace will be safe in their persons and properties, and whoever of the Quraysh come to Medina on their way to Egypt or Syria will be safe in their persons and properties

also. This marks a fresh start between us, with no treachery or theft. Also, whoever wishes to enter the confederacy and alliance of Muḥammad may do so, and whoever wishes to enter the confederacy and alliance of the Quraysh may do so."

So the Khuzāᶜah tribe jumped up and said: "We are in the confederacy of Muḥammad!"

Then the Banu Bakr jumped up and said: "We are in the confederacy of the Quraysh!"

Then God's Messenger: "And also that you will allow us to perform our rites at the Sanctuary."

Suhayl replied: "By God, lest the Arabs say we were coerced that shall be next year." So it was written. Suhayl continued: "On condition that no man of ours comes to you, even if he follows your religion, save that you return him to us. And whoever of yours comes to us, we do not have to return him to you."

So the Muslims said: "Glory to God! How shall we give the idolaters someone who has come to us as a Muslim?"

God's Messenger said: "Whoever from us goes to them, God has made him distant. But whoever of them comes to us, we shall return him to them. And if God sees Islam in his heart, He will make a way out for him."

Suhayl said: "On condition that you depart from us this year, so you will not enter Mecca while we are there. Next year, we will vacate Mecca for you so that you may enter it with your companions and remain there three days. You may not enter it with weapons save for your swords in their scabbards and your mounts. And also that these sacrificial animals will remain where we have detained them, you will not send them forth to us." Then he said: "We will drive forth and you will return back."

While this was happening, Abū Jandal, the son of Suhayl b. ᶜAmr, came shuffling in his shackles, having escaped from the rear of Mecca, and threw himself amongst the Muslims. Suhayl said: "This, O Muḥamad, is the first thing required of you under our treaty—that you return him!"

The Prophet said: "We have not sealed the treaty yet."

He said: "By God, then I will never make a deal with you!"

The Prophet said: "Then allow me to look after him."

Suhayl said: "I will not put him in your care."

"Of course you can."
"I will not."
Mukarriz said: "No, he is under our care already!"
Abū Jandal b. Suhayl said: "O Muslims, shall I go back to the idolaters when I have come as a Muslim? Do you not see what has happened to me?"
And they had punished him most severely.
ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb said:
By God I have not doubted since I become a Muslim except on that day. For I went to the Prophet and said: "Are you not God's Prophet?"
He said: "Of course."
"Are we not upon truth and our enemies upon falsehood?"
"Of course."
"Then why are we dishonoring our religion?"
"I am the Messenger of God, I will not disobey Him while He is my helper!"
"But didn't you tell us that we will come to the Sanctuary and circumambulate it?"
"Yes. But did I tell you it would be this year?"
"No."
"So you will come and circumambulate it."
Then God's Messenger slaughtered his sacrificial animal and called for his razor to shave his head. Then there came some believing women, and God sent down the verse *O you who have faith! When faithful women come to you as immigrants, test them* (60:10).
Muḥammad b. Isḥāq b. Yassār says: Buraydah b. Sufyān narrated to me from Muḥammad b. Kaʿb:
The scribe of God's Messenger during this treaty was ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. God's Messenger told him: "Write: '*This is what Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allah agreed upon with Suhayl b. ʿUrwah…*'" but he hesitated and refused to write anything except "Muḥammad, the Messenger of God." So God's Messenger told him: "You will be in the same situation one day and you will be forced to accede." So he wrote what they said.
Then God's Messenger returned to Medina and a man from the Quraysh called Abū Baṣīr came, and he was a Muslim. But the

Quraysh sent two men in pursuit of him and they said: "You signed the treaty with us!" So he gave him to the two of them and they went with him until they reached Dhū al-Ḥulayfah, where they sat and ate some dates they had. Abū Baṣīr told one of the men: "That's a very good sword you have there, bring it out!"
The man replied: "Yes, it's very good. I've used it time and again."
Abū Baṣīr said: "Let me see!"
Abū Baṣīr snatched the sword from him and struck him with it until he was dead. The other mad fled until he reached Medina and entered the Mosque racing. When God's Messenger saw him, he said: "This one has seen a fright!"
When he reached the Prophet, the man said: "By God, he killed my companion, and I am a dead man!"
Then Abū Baṣīr came and said: "O Messenger of God! God discharged your duty and you returned me to them. Then God saved me from them!"
The Prophet said: "Woe to his mother. He would have started a war if he had anyone with him."
When Abū Baṣir heard this, he realized that he would still return him to them. So he fled until he reached the shores of the sea.
Abū Jandal b. Suhayl also escaped them and joined up with Abū Baṣīr. No man who had embraced Islam fled from the Quraysh save that he joined Abū Baṣīr, until a band of men had formed around him…. By God, they did not hear of a single camel of the Quraysh setting off for Syria save that they ambushed it and plundered its wealth! So the Quraysh sent word to the Prophet, adjuring him for the sake of God and their kinship to him to send word to these men that any of them who came to him would be granted safety. Whereat the Prophet sent word to Abū Baṣīr and his band and they came to him.

(3) In his *Tafsīr*, al-Qummī narrates a lengthy tradition whose beginning we quoted at the beginning of the discussion:
After the treaty had been written, God's Messenger told his companions: "Sacrifice your offerings and shave your heads." But they refused and said: "How shall we sacrifice and shave while we have not circumambulated the House or run between Safa and Marwa?" The Prophet became distressed and complained about this to Umm Salamah, who told him: "O Messenger of God, you

sacrifice and shave yourself!" So God's Messenger sacrificed his animal and shaved his head, and the people sacrificed—some with certainty, some with hesitation and others with doubt.

Author's comments: And this is narrated in other narrations from both Shiʿi and Sunni sources. This is what Ṭabrisī narrates, summarized to an extent, from what Bukhārī, Abū Dāwūd, and Nasāʾī narrate from Marwān and Miswar.

(4) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Bayhaqī relates from ʿUrwah:

God's Messenger was returning to Medina from Ḥudaybiyyah when one of his companions said: "By God this is not a victory. We were barred from the House and our offerings were barred too. God's Messenger was detained at Ḥudaybiyyah and he sent back two Muslims who had come out [to join us]!"

Word of this reached God's Messenger and he replied: "A wicked statement. This is the greatest victory! The idolaters had settled on expelling you from their land by force, demanding the issue from you and desiring you to go back, and they detested you, but God gave you victory over them and brought you back safe and successful, assured of [divine] reward. This is the greatest victory! "Have you forgotten the Day of Uḥud when you ran for the hills oblivious to anyone else while I was calling you from behind? Are you forgetting the Day of the Confederates when they came from above and below, and how your eyes rolled back in your heads and your hearts leapt into your throats? And you hold such negative thoughts about God?"

The Muslims said: "God and His Messenger have spoken the truth. This is the greatest victory! By God, O Prophet of God, we did not think of this as you did. You are indeed more knowledgeable about God and these matters than we are!" So God sent down Sūrah al-Fatḥ.

Author's comments: There are many accounts of Ḥudaybiyyah that have been narrated; we have mentioned only a selection of them.

(5) In his *Tafsīr*, al-Qummī narrates with a chain of narrators going back to ʿUmar b. Yazīd Bayyāʿ al-Sābirī:

I asked Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq] about God's saying in His Book: *that God may forgive you what is past of your sin and what is to come* (48:2). He told me: "The Prophet never sinned. He did not even think of sinning. But God burdened him with

the sins of his followers (*shīʿah*), then forgave them."

(6) In *ʿUyūn*, in the sitting (*majlis*) of al-Riḍā with al-Maʾmūn, Ibn al-Jahm narrates:

I attended the *majlis* of al-Maʾmūn and al-Riḍā was with him. al-Maʾmūn said to him: "O Son of the Messenger of God, do you not say that the Prophets are infallible?"

He said: "Yes."

"So tell me what you say about God's words: *that God may forgive you what is past of your sin (*dhanb*) and what is to come*."

Al-Riḍā said: "No one was more at fault (*dhanb*)[1] than God's Messenger in the eyes of the Meccan idolaters. This is because they used to worship three hundred and sixty deities besides God, so when he brought them the call to devote themselves exclusively to God (*ikhlāṣ*), this was a terrible thing. They said: 'Will you replace all the gods with just one? This is an incredible thing!' So they went off saying: 'Go and hold fast to your gods. This is a thing designed! We have not heard of such a thing among the people of latter days! This is nothing but a fabrication!' But when God granted His Prophet victory over Mecca, He said: 'O Muḥammad! *Indeed We have inaugurated for you a clear victory that God may forgive what is past of your sin and what is to come* in the eyes of the idolaters of Mecca because of your calling [people] to Divine Unity in what is past and what is to come.' This is because some of the idolaters of Mecca had submitted, while others had departed. Those who remained could not deny Divine Unity when people called them to it, so in this regard his fault was forgiven in their eyes as he had triumphed over them."

Whereat al-Maʾmūn said: "How wondrous, O Abū al-Ḥasan!"

(7) In *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, it is narrated from Manṣūr b. Ḥāzim that Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq] said:

God's Messenger did not stop repeating the verse *Say, "Indeed, should I disobey my Lord, I fear the punishment of a tremendous day"* (6:15) until Sūrah al-Fatḥ was revealed. Then he did not return to that speech.

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1 As will become clear, Imām al-Riḍā is using *dhanb* here in the sense of "evil consequence" as Ṭabāṭabāʾī has explained in his main commentary on the verse. [Trans.]

Author's comments: This meaning has also been narrated in Sunni sources. However, the tradition is not without its issues because it assumes that the meaning of "sin" (*dhanb*) in the verse is an act of disobeying God that would contravene infallibility.

(8) And in *al-Kāfī*, it is narrated from Jamīl:

I asked Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq] about God's saying: *It is He who sent down composure into the hearts of the faithful* (48:4). He said: "It is faith (*īmān*). God says: *that they might enhance their faith* (48:4)."

Author's comments: The apparent meaning of the narration is that he took God's words *that they might enhance their faith* to be an exposition of *composure* (sakīnah), and there are other narrations with this meaning too.

(9) In the same source, with a chain going back to Abū ʿAmr al-Zubayrī:

I asked [Imām al-Ṣādiq]: "O learned one, tell me which deeds are best in the eyes of God?"

He [Imām al-Ṣādiq] said: "Something without which God will not accept anything!"

I said: "What is it?"

He said: "Faith in God whom there is no god besides is the highest of deeds in degree, the most noble in rank and the loftiest in its share [of reward]."

"Would you tell me about faith? Is it words or deeds?"

"Faith in its entirety is deeds (*al-īmān ʿamal kulluh*), and words are a part of those deeds, as God has enjoined in His Book whose light is clear and whose authority is firm. The Book testifies to this and calls people to it."

"May I be your ransom! Describe it to me that I might understand it."

"Faith is conditions, levels and attributes. Some faith is utterly complete, while some is plainly lacking, and there is some which is preponderant [that is, it is more complete than lacking]."

"Can faith really be complete or lacking or increased?"

"Yes!"

"How is that so?"

"Because God enjoined faith upon the limbs of the son of Adam, divided it between them and separated it amongst them. So there is not a single one of his limbs except that it has been entrusted

with some faith that is other than the faith that has been entrusted to its companion. Then, whoever meets God safeguarding his limbs and with each limb fulfilling what God hath enjoined upon it, then he will meet God having completed his faith and He will be one of the inhabitants of paradise. But whoever betrays this trust in any of them, or exceeds the bounds set down by God therein, then he will meet God lacking in faith."

"I understand a person's faith being complete or lacking, but where does its increase come from?"

"From God's saying: *Whenever a surah is sent down, there are some of them who say, 'Which of you did it increase in faith?' As for those who have faith, it increases them in faith, and they rejoice. But as for those in whose heart is a sickness, it only adds defilement to their defilement, and they die while they are faithless.* (9:124–125) And His saying: *We relate to you their account in truth. They were indeed youths who had faith in their Lord, and We had enhanced them in guidance* (18:13).

"If it had all been the same, then there could have been no increase or decrease and no one would have been superior to anyone else; its blessing would be equal for all and all people would be equal, so no one would be superior to anyone else. But it is through the completeness of their faith that the faithful enter paradise, and by the enhancement of faith that the faithful occupy different ranks of superiority in God's eyes, while it is through lack of faith that the lax enter hellfire."

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Verses 8–10

In this second section of verses from the sūrah, God informs His Prophet with reverence and awe that He has sent him as a witness, a bearer of good news and a warner, to whom obedience is counted as obedience to God and to whom swearing allegiance is counted as swearing allegiance to God. The first section of verses enumerated God's blessings upon (1) His Prophet: granting him victory and forgiveness, and completing His blessings, guidance and assistance, and (2) upon the faithful: by casting composure into their hearts and admitting them to paradise. It also warned the idolaters and the hypocrites of God's wrath, His curse and the fire.

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ شَاهِدًا وَمُبَشِّرًا وَنَذِيرًا ﴿٨﴾

(48:8) ***Indeed We have sent you as a witness, and as a bearer of good news and warner.***

Here, his being a witness means him witnessing the deeds of faith and faithlessness and righteous or vicious behavior. And God has said more than once that he is a witness. We have discussed this witnessing fully already; he witnesses in this world but he bears witness in the next.

Meanwhile, his being a bearer of good news means conveying good news to those who have faith and are Godwary through seeking nearness to God and seeking His abundant reward. On the other hand, he is a warner because he warns and threatens those who disbelieve and turn away of a painful punishment.

لِتُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَتُعَزِّرُوهُ وَتُوَقِّرُوهُ وَتُسَبِّحُوهُ بُكْرَةً وَأَصِيلًا ﴿٩﴾

(48:9) ***that you may have faith in God and His Messenger, and that you may support Him and revere Him, and glorify Him morning and evening.***

The most well-known mode of recitation (*qirāʾah*) for this verse is reading the four verbs with the second-person *tāʾ*; however, Ibn Kathīr and Abū ʿAmr recite them with the third-person *yāʾ*, and their recitation

seems more probable given the context of the verse.[1] In any case, the *lām* prefixed to *have faith* (li tuʾminū) signifies causation. In other words: *We sent you… that you* [pl.] *might have faith in God*.

"Support" (*taʿzīr*), according to what has been said, means assistance. "Reverence" (*tawqīr*) means to hold someone in high regard, as when God says: *What is the matter with you that you do not look upon Allah with veneration* (71:13). It appears that the pronouns in *and that you may support Him and revere Him, and glorify Him* all refer to God. This renders the meaning: "We sent you… that they might have faith in God and His Messenger, and that they might support Him with their hands and their tongues, and revere Him and glorify Him—namely, through prayer—in the morning and the evening."

It is said: The pronouns in *and that you may support Him and revere Him* refer to the Messenger while *and glorify Him* refers to God. However, what renders this reading weak is that it requires pronouns that are visibly in harmony to be given different referents.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُبَايِعُونَكَ إِنَّمَا يُبَايِعُونَ اللَّهَ يَدُ اللَّهِ فَوْقَ أَيْدِيهِمْ ۚ فَمَنْ نَكَثَ فَإِنَّمَا يَنْكُثُ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ ۖ وَمَنْ أَوْفَىٰ بِمَا عَاهَدَ عَلَيْهُ اللَّهَ فَسَيُؤْتِيهِ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا ﴿١٠﴾

(48:10) ***Indeed those who swear allegiance to you, swear allegiance only to God: the hand of God is above their hands. So whosoever breaks his oath, breaks it only to his own detriment, and whoever fulfils the covenant he has made with God, He will give him a great reward.***

"Swearing allegiance" (*bayʿah*) is a pledge to give one's obedience to someone. In his *Mufradāt*, al-Rāghib says: "You give allegiance to the Sultan if you guarantee to give him your obedience in matters within his purview." The term is actually derived from the word *bayʿ*, meaning sale, in its common sense. This is because it was their custom, when they wanted

1 Meaning *have faith* (tuʾminū), *support* (tuʿazzirū), *revere* (tuwaqqirū) and *glorify* (tusabbiḥū) are all read with a *tāʾ* at their beginning, which means their subjects are the second-person plural (that is, "you"). The recitation of Ibn Kathīr and Abū ʿAmr, which places a *yāʾ* in place of the *tāʾ*, makes this into a third-person plural (that is, "they"). [Trans.]

to conclude a contract of sale, that the seller would give his hand to the buyer; it was as if this action symbolized the transference of ownership because this is the transference of the right of disposal (*taṣarrufāt*), which is mostly exercised by a person's hand. Therefore, when the seller shook the buyer's hand, it was as if this transferred those rights from one hand to another. And this is why the act of shaking hands when giving a promise of obedience is called *bayʿah*; the essence of its meaning is that the one pledging allegiance is giving his hand to the Sultan to do with as he pleases.

Indeed those who swear allegiance to you, swear allegiance only to God—this makes pledging allegiance to the Prophet equivalent to pledging allegiance to God Himself. The reason for this is that the promise of obedience that they offer to him they are actually offering to God because obedience to the Prophet is obedience to God. Then, in order to affirm this more fully, He says: *the hand of God is above their hands*. This makes the Prophet's hand God's hand, just as He makes the Prophet's throwing His own throwing in the verse: *and you did not throw when you threw, rather it was Allah who threw* (8:17).

And there are many such verses where God ascribes the work of the Prophet to Himself, for example:

Whoever obeys the Messenger certainly obeys Allah. (4:80)

Yet it is not you that they deny, but it is Allah's signs that the wrongdoers impugn. (6:33)

You have no hand in the matter. (3:128)

God says: *So whosoever breaks his oath, breaks it only to his own detriment*—to break one's oath means to violate one's pledge of allegiance. This sentence follows logically from the sentence *Indeed those who swear allegiance to you, swear allegiance only to God*. So it means: If pledging allegiance to you is pledging allegiance to God, then whoever breaks his oath of allegiance is breaking his allegiance to God. He will only hurt himself by doing this, just as He will only benefit himself by staying true to his pledge, because God is utterly needless of the worlds.

And whoever fulfils the covenant he has made with God, He will give him a great reward—this is a beautiful promise for those who preserve their covenant and fulfil it.

And this verse would seem to suggest that when they pledged allegiance to him, it was the Prophet who placed his hand on top of their hands, not the other way around.

Commentators have different opinions about the words *the hand of*

God is above their hands.

It is said that it is a metaphorical allusion which serves to affirm and emphasize the meaning of what came before it, namely that pledging allegiance to the Messenger is equivalent to pledging allegiance to God without any distinction. It gives the impression that God is one of those people making this pledge, so it affirms the presence of his hand above the hands of those who pledge allegiance to God's Messenger in the place of the Messenger's hand. However it is not suitable for the sake of God's sanctity to imagine Him in a form He has divested Himself of.

It is said: The meaning of God's "hand" (*yad*) is His power and assistance. In other words, God's power and assistance are above their power and assistance, so trust in God's assistance rather than theirs. However, the context is one of magnifying the pledge of allegiance to the Prophet and that their pledging allegiance to him is equivalent to pledging allegiance to God. This means that trusting in God and His assistance, even though it is undoubtedly good in any situation, is foreign to the immediate context of the verse.

It is said: The meaning of "hand" is God's gifts and blessings, namely that God has blessed them with divine reward or with the success of being able to pledge allegiance, and this blessing is above any good that they are doing for His Prophet by pledging allegiance to him.

It is said: It means that His blessing them with guidance is greater than whatever good they are doing for His Prophet by obeying him.

And there are other interpretations besides the ones we have mentioned that are without basis.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn ʿAdī, Ibn Mardawayh, al-Khaṭīb [al-Baghdādī], and Ibn ʿAsākir—in his *Tārīkh*—narrate from Jābir b. ʿAbd Allāh:
When the verse *that you may support Him* was revealed to God's Messenger, he asked his companions: "What is that?"
They said: "God and His Messenger know better!"
He said: "That you assist Him."

(2) In *ʿUyūn*, it is narrated from ʿAbd al-Salām b. Ṣāliḥ al-Harawī:
I asked ʿAlī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā: "O son of God's Messenger! What do you say about the tradition narrated by the authorities of traditions: that the faithful will visit their Lord from their abodes

in paradise?"

He said: "O Abū Ṣilat, verily God favored His Prophet, Muḥammad, above all creatures, even the Prophets and the angels, and made obedience to him obedience to Himself, pledging allegiance to him pledging allegiance to Himself and visiting him in this world and the hereafter visiting Himself! God says: *Whoever obeys the Messenger certainly obeys Allah* (4:80), and: *Indeed those who swear allegiance to you, swear allegiance only to God* (48:10), and the Prophet said: 'Whomsoever visits me while I am alive or after my death, He has visited God.'

"His station in paradise is the highest station and whoever visits him at his station in paradise from their abodes has visited God!"

(3) In *Kitāb al-Irshād*, al-Mufīd narrates in the tradition of the pledge of allegiance given to Imām al-Riḍā:

Maʾmūn sat and set two grand cushions down for al-Riḍā so that he would have the same kind of seat and covers. He seated al-Riḍā in the court, wearing a turban and a sword. Then he ordered his son, ʿAbbās b. al-Maʾmūn, to be the first of the people to make the pledge of allegiance to him. Al-Riḍā raised his hand and touched his own face with it, then placed its palm upon their faces. Al-Maʾmūn demanded: "Stretch out your hand for the pledge of allegiance."

Al-Riḍā said: "The Messenger of God used to take the pledge in this way when the people pledged allegiance to him."

Then, people pledged allegiance to him while his hand was above their hands.

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Verses 11–17

This third section of verses addresses the state of the Bedouins who stayed behind when God's Messenger went on his journey to Ḥudaybiyyah and who did not respond to his summons. According to what has been said in this regard, they were the Bedouins around Medina belonging to the tribes of Juhaynah, Muzaynah, Ghaffār, Ashjaʿ, Aslam, and Diʾl. They held back and did not accompany him, saying: "Muḥammad and those with him are going to a people who fought them only yesterday in their own backyard and massacred them! They will never return from this journey; they shall never see their homes or their families again."

As a result, in these verses God tells His Prophet that they will come to you and try to excuse their staying behind by saying they were preoccupied with their possessions and their families, and they will ask you to plead to God for their forgiveness. But God denounces their claims and says that the real reason they stayed behind was because they held evil thoughts. He also tells him that they will ask to come with you but they will not be allowed, except that they will be asked to fight another people, and if they obey then they will be granted an abundant reward but if they turn away then they shall have a painful punishment.

سَيَقُولُ لَكَ الْمُخَلَّفُونَ مِنَ الْأَعْرَابِ شَغَلَتْنَا أَمْوَالُنَا وَأَهْلُونَا فَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَنَا ۚ يَقُولُونَ بِأَلْسِنَتِهِمْ مَا لَيْسَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ ۚ قُلْ فَمَنْ يَمْلِكُ لَكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا إِنْ أَرَادَ بِكُمْ ضَرًّا أَوْ أَرَادَ بِكُمْ نَفْعًا ۚ بَلْ كَانَ اللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا ﴿١١﴾

(48:11) ***The Bedouins who were left behind*** **(al-mukhallafūn min al-aʿrāb)** ***will tell you, "Our possessions and our families kept us occupied. So plead for our forgiveness!" They say with their tongues what is not in their hearts. Say, "Who can be of any avail to you against God, should He desire to cause you harm or desire to bring you benefit? Rather God is well aware of what you do."***

In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, we read:

One who is *mukhallaf* is left in a place behind those who are going out of a land, and it is etymologically derived from "behind" (*khalf*), and its opposite is "ahead" (*muqaddam*).

According to what scholars say, *aʿrāb* refers a group of Bedouin Arabs; it is not used to refer to settled Arabs. It is a plural noun which has no singular form.[1]

The Bedouins who were left behind will tell you…: This foretells to the Prophet what they will say to him, and the wording suggests that these verses were revealed while he was returning from Ḥudaybiyyah to Medina but before he reached his destination.

Our possessions and our families kept us occupied. So plead for our forgiveness! In other words, "What prevented us from accompanying you and going forth with you were our possessions and our families; there was no one here to look after them and we feared they would be lost so we stayed with them. Ask God to forgive us for holding back from you." The way the request is phrased indicates that they saw their holding back as a sin; so when they say that it was their possessions and families that detained them, they do not mean to use this to justify their sin. Rather, they mention it as the reason for their sinning.

They say with their tongues what is not in their hearts: God denounces everything they have just said and asked as false; so neither was it their possessions and families that held them back, nor do they seriously want him to plead with God to forgive them, rather they only asked him that in order to protect themselves from blame and reproach.

Say, "Who can be of any avail to you against God, should He desire to cause you harm or desire to bring you benefit…?" This is a very clever reply to their excuses about being preoccupied by their possessions and families. It means that God is the one to whom all creation and command belongs; He is the sovereign who governs everything; there is no Lord besides Him, so there is no harm or benefit except by His will and His decree. This means that no one has any way to compel him to forgo harming someone or to do something good for them if He wills the opposite of what the person desires. In this case, the fact you avoided going with

1 However, it can be made into an artificial singular by turning it into the form of a *nisbah* adjective; "*aʿrābī*" lit. "of the *aʿrāb*." This is common in traditions where a Bedouin (described in these traditions as an *aʿrābī*) comes to ask a question from the Prophet. [Trans.]

the Prophet in order to help the religion and were preoccupied with these things with which you excused your behavior—protecting your property and families—does not avail anything against God. It will not repel harm from you if God wishes to harm you, nor will it help you obtain anything good, nor will it hasten Him in doing any good to you should He wish.

The reply *Say, "Who can be of any avail…?"* should be read as assuming the veracity of their excuses; that they were concerned with avoiding harm by holding fast to the worldly means at their disposal, including turning their backs on the faithful and holding back from the religious mission. However none of that will do you any good because the matter depends on God's will alone, so the verse carries the same meaning as *Nothing will befall us except what Allah has ordained for us* (9:51).

Even if making use of the worldly means at our disposal and not neglecting them is something God has commanded us to do, this is only the case insofar as it does not conflict with more important priorities, such as defending the Truth, even if this involves some potential hardships. Unless of course—God forbid!—that there is some danger we are absolutely certain about which means that our efforts will be futile!

Rather God is well aware of what you do: This is a subtle warning which alludes to the fact they were lying when they said: *Our possessions and our families kept us occupied.* (48:11).

بَلْ ظَنَنْتُمْ أَنْ لَنْ يَنْقَلِبَ الرَّسُولُ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِيهِمْ أَبَدًا وَزُيِّنَ ذَٰلِكَ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ وَظَنَنْتُمْ ظَنَّ السَّوْءِ وَكُنْتُمْ قَوْمًا بُورًا ﴿١٢﴾

(48:12) ***Rather you thought that the Messenger and the faithful would not ever return to their folk, and that was made to seem decorous to your hearts, and you entertained evil thoughts, and you were a ruined lot.***

This expounds what was alluded to above when God said: *rather God is well aware of what you do* referring to their false excuses. It means: "You did not hold back from going with the Messenger because you were preoccupied with your possessions and families, rather you thought that the Messenger and the faithful would never return to their families, and that those going out would be killed at the hands of the Quraysh because of the latter's numbers and power. That is the real reason you held back."

…and that was made to seem decorous to your hearts…: In other

words, Satan made those evil thoughts seem decorous to your hearts, so you acted in accordance with those decorous evil thoughts; you stayed back and did not accompany the Prophet out of fear that you would perish or be destroyed.

It is said that their *evil thoughts* were that the Messenger and the faithful would never return to their families, but it is equally possible that this could mean that God would not support His Messenger or make His religion triumph, as we have seen in the verse *who entertain a bad opinion of God* (48:6). In fact, this interpretation is closer to the apparent meaning of the text.

وَمَنْ لَمْ يُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ فَإِنَّا أَعْتَدْنَا لِلْكَافِرِينَ سَعِيرًا ﴿١٣﴾

(48:13) ***As for those who have no faith in God and His Messenger, We have prepared a blaze for the faithless.***

Here, faith in God is joined with faith in His Messenger to show that disbelieving in the Messenger by not obeying Him is tantamount to disbelief in God. This verse carries the tone of a threat.

We have prepared a blaze for the faithless—Normally, one would say "We have prepared a blaze for them" but here the word *faithless* has been used instead of the pronoun to clearly illustrate the reason for the rule by attaching it to the active participle. This renders the meaning: "We have prepared and readied for them a blaze because of their disbelief; a roaring inferno." And *a blaze* is left indefinite to inspire awe and terror.

وَلِلَّهِ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ يَغْفِرُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۚ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا ﴿١٤﴾

(48:14) ***To God belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth: He forgives whomever He wishes, and punishes whomever He wishes, and God is all-forgiving, all-merciful.***

The meaning of this verse is obvious, and it affirms what is above. By appending the Divine Names *all-forgiving* (ghafūr) and *all-merciful* (raḥīm) to God's absolute dominion of the heavens and the earth, this verse alludes to the fact that God's mercy precedes His wrath in order to encourage people to seek His forgiveness and mercy.

سَيَقُولُ الْمُخَلَّفُونَ إِذَا انْطَلَقْتُمْ إِلَىٰ مَغَانِمَ لِتَأْخُذُوهَا ذَرُونَا نَتَّبِعْكُمْ ۖ يُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يُبَدِّلُوا كَلَامَ اللَّهِ ۚ قُلْ لَنْ تَتَّبِعُونَا كَذَٰلِكُمْ قَالَ اللَّهُ مِنْ قَبْلُ ۖ فَسَيَقُولُونَ بَلْ تَحْسُدُونَنَا ۚ بَلْ كَانُوا لَا يَفْقَهُونَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿١٥﴾

(48:15) ***Those who were left to stay behind will say, when you set out to capture booty: "Let us follow you." They desire to change the word of God. Say, "You shall never follow us! Thus has God said beforehand." Then they will say, "Rather you are envious of us." Rather they do not understand but a little.***

The verse foretells that the faithful will undertake a military expedition and be granted victory, winning booty in the process. Those who stayed behind on this occasion will be asked permission to go with them in the hopes of winning riches. This is the expedition to Khaybar which the Prophet and the faithful undertook, conquering it and winning booty. But God restricted this expedition to those who had been with the Prophet on his mission to Ḥudaybiyyah—no one else was allowed to participate.

This means: You will go on a military expedition in which you will attain booty, and those who stayed behind on this occasion will say: "Let us follow you!"

They desire to change the word of God meaning His promise to the companions at Ḥudaybiyyah that He will give them the riches of Khaybar after they capture it, when He said: *God has promised you abundant spoils which you will capture. He has expedited this one for you…* (48:20). And he alludes to this in the present verse, when He says *when you set out to capture booty*.

Say, "You shall never follow us! Thus has God said beforehand": Here, God commands the Prophet to forbid them from following them based on what God has said before they asked his permission to follow.

Then they will say, "Rather you are envious of us": Meaning that those who stayed behind during Ḥudaybiyyah will say after their request to follow was refused *"Rather you are envious of us"* and God responds *Rather they do not understand but a little.* He does not even direct His words to them because of the fact that they do not understand discourse, so He directs His response to the Prophet and says: *Rather they do not understand but a little.*

This is because when they say "*Rather you are envious of us,*" this is

rejecting what the Prophet said to them at God's command: *"You shall never follow us! Thus has God said beforehand."* So they mean that you have not prevented us from following you because of any command from God; rather, you and those with you at Ḥudaybiyyah don't want us to come because you want to keep the booty for yourselves and not share any with us!

But this is not something a believer with reason or discernment would say to the Messenger of God who does not make any pronouncements without there being a command from God. Unless this is because they are so simple-minded and parochial, in which case directing such words to the Prophet while claiming to have faith and submit provides the plainest evidence of their weak minds and dearth of understanding.

This shows that by *they do not understand but a little*, God means they are simple-minded people who do not understand what is said—He does not mean that they understand some but not other parts, which is common, or that some of them understand but most of them do not, as other commentators have suggested.

قُلْ لِلْمُخَلَّفِينَ مِنَ الْأَعْرَابِ سَتُدْعَوْنَ إِلَىٰ قَوْمٍ أُولِي بَأْسٍ شَدِيدٍ تُقَاتِلُونَهُمْ أَوْ يُسْلِمُونَ ۖ فَإِنْ تُطِيعُوا يُؤْتِكُمُ اللَّهُ أَجْرًا حَسَنًا ۖ وَإِنْ تَتَوَلَّوْا كَمَا تَوَلَّيْتُمْ مِنْ قَبْلُ يُعَذِّبْكُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا ﴿١٦﴾

(48:16) ***Say to the Bedouins who were left to stay behind, "You will be called against a people of a great might: they will embrace Islam, or you will fight them. So if you obey, God will give you a good reward; but if you turn away like you turned away before, He will punish you with a painful punishment."***

Commentators have disagreed about who exactly these people they will be called to fight are. It is said variously: They are the Hawāzin, the Thaqīf, or both of them together. It is also said: They are the Romans at the expeditions to Muʾtah and Tabūk. It is said: They are the Apostates whom Abū Bakr fought after the Prophet passed away. And it is said: "The Bedouins of Persia and their Kurds."

From the words *You will be called…* it appears that they are some of the people whom the Prophet fought against after capturing Khaybar, including the Hawāzin, Thaqīf, and the Romans at Muʾtah. Based on the

context, the previous statement—*Say, "You shall never follow us!"*—is concerned with them following the Prophet on the expedition to Khaybar.

They will embrace Islam, or you will fight them: This indicates the opening up of possibilities; namely either that you will fight them or they will embrace Islam. This shows that they must be polytheists who are not given the option to pay *jizyah* as the People of the Book do. Their only options are to embrace Islam or fight.

It is not correct to read *you will fight them* as an adjective for *a people* because they are being called to fight the people, not to fight a people who are fighting them. This is what has been said.

Then He finishes His statement with a promise of reward for obedience and a threat of punishment for disobedience; *so if you obey…* by going forth to fight them *…God will give you a good reward; but if you turn away…*—by disobeying God and His Messenger and not going forth—*… like you turned away before…*—when you did not join him on his journey to Ḥudaybiyyah—*…He will punish you with a painful punishment*—meaning in this world, as is apparent from the context, or both in this world and the Hereafter.

لَيْسَ عَلَى الْأَعْمَىٰ حَرَجٌ وَلَا عَلَى الْأَعْرَجِ حَرَجٌ وَلَا عَلَى الْمَرِيضِ حَرَجٌ ۗ وَمَنْ يُطِعِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ يُدْخِلْهُ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ۖ وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّ يُعَذِّبْهُ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا ﴿١٧﴾

(48:17) ***There is no toil for the blind, nor is there any toil for the lame, nor is there toil for the sick and whoever obeys God and His Messenger, He will admit him into gardens with streams running in them, and whoever refuses to comply, He will punish him with a painful punishment.***

This exempts those afflicted by a condition which makes going on *jihād* difficult for them from the general rule of the obligation to participate in *jihād*. It signifies this by removing the corollary of going on *jihād*, namely *toil* (ḥaraj).

Then He completes the verse by repeating the like of what He mentioned in the previous verse: *…and whoever obeys God and His Messenger, He will admit him into gardens with streams running in them, and whoever refuses to comply, He will punish him with a painful punishment.*

Verses 18-28

In the fourth section of verses, God mentions those of the faithful who went with the Prophet on his mission to Ḥudaybiyyah and says that He was pleased with them when they pledged allegiance to the Prophet beneath the tree. Then He enumerates His blessings upon them when He sent down composure and rewarded them with a victory near-at-hand and abundant spoils which they would capture.

He also foretells—as a glad-tiding—that if they fought the idolaters, the latter would turn their backs and flee, and that the vision the Prophet saw was a genuine vision; they will enter the Holy Sanctuary in safety, with shaved heads and without fear, for God hath sent His Messenger with guidance and the True Religion to triumph over all religions, though the idolaters be averse.

لَقَدْ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ يُبَايِعُونَكَ تَحْتَ الشَّجَرَةِ فَعَلِمَ مَا فِي
قُلُوبِهِمْ فَأَنْزَلَ السَّكِينَةَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأَثَابَهُمْ فَتْحًا قَرِيبًا ﴿١٨﴾ وَمَغَانِمَ كَثِيرَةً
يَأْخُذُونَهَا ۗ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا ﴿١٩﴾

(48:18-19) ***God was certainly pleased with the faithful when they swore allegiance to you under the tree. He knew what was in their hearts, so He sent down composure on them, and requited them with a victory near at hand and abundant spoils that they will capture, and God is all-mighty, all-wise.***

"To be pleased" (*riḍā*) is a form taken on by the soul when it encounters something which is in harmony with it and which it accepts without effort. The opposite of being pleased is annoyance (*sakht*). When *riḍā* is ascribed to God, it means He will reward with a good recompense. It does not mean that He takes on a fleeting form or temporary quality of accident because this is impossible for Him. When God is pleased, this is an Attribute of Act rather than an Attribute of Essence (*min ṣifāt al-fiʿl lā min ṣifāt al-dhāt*).

It is said that the verb *riḍā* can be used transitively with a direct object, or transitively with the prepositions *ʿan* or *bi*. If it takes a direct object, then

it can be used to refer to an entity—e.g. "I am pleased with Zayd" (*raḍītu zaydan*)—or a concept—example "I am pleased with Zayd's leadership." God says: *and I have approved* [radītū] *Islam as your religion* (5:3). If it uses the preposition *ʿan*, it takes an entity as its object, such as when God says: *Allah is pleased with them (*raḍiya allāhu ʿanhum*), and they are pleased with Him* (98:8). And if it uses the preposition *bi*, then it takes a concept as its object, such as in God's saying: *Are you pleased with the life of this world* (a raḍītum bi al-ḥayāt al-dunyā) *instead of the Hereafter?* (9:38).

When *riḍā* is ascribed to God as an attribute of action that carries the meaning of divine reward, this is always in response to an action rather than an entity. So, when His *riḍā* appears to take an entity as its object or is made transitive with the preposition *ʿan*, as we see in the verse presently under discussion—*God was certainly pleased with the faithful…*—this means we must treat His pleasure—which is connected to an action (which is itself connected to an entity), namely their pledging allegiance (the real object of the divine pleasure here)—as a container for those with whom God is pleased. Therefore, the divine pleasure must be connected with them themselves.

God was certainly pleased with the faithful when they swore allegiance to you under the tree: This foretells that God will reward them in return for their pledging allegiance to the Prophet beneath the tree. The pledge of allegiance on the day of Ḥudaybiyyah was given beneath an umbrella thorn tree, where those who were with the Prophet pledged allegiance to him. This shows that the time qualifier *when they swore allegiance to you under the tree* is connected with *God was certainly pleased….*

He knew what was in their hearts, so He sent down composure on them, and requited them with a victory near at hand and abundant spoils that they will capture, and God is all-mighty, all-wise: This follows logically from *God was certainly pleased…* The words *what was in their hearts* means their good intentions and veracity in pledging allegiance to him, because it is not pleasing God because of its outward form and appearance, but because of its sincere intention and dedication to Him.

So this means: He knew the sincere intentions and dedication in their hearts when they pledged allegiance to you.

It is said: *What was in their hearts* means faith, its purity, and their love of the religion.

It is said: Their distress and disdain at being easy with the idolaters and concluding a treaty with them.

However neither of these readings are supported by the tone of the verses, as should be obvious.

Poser: *What was in their hearts* does not mean everything that was in their hearts, but rather their sincere intentions in pledging allegiance, as was mentioned. It is God's knowledge of their intentions—given the attributes of sincerity and dedication—that constitutes the occasion for His being pleased with them, rather than a result of His being pleased with them. The logical consequence of this is that His being pleased derives from the His knowledge, which would entail saying: "He knew what was in their hearts, so He was pleased with them." But in the verse we see the opposite of this is the case.

Response: Just as the effect (*musabbab*) depends upon the cause (*sabab*) in its actualization and existence, so too does the cause—whether it is of the sufficient (*tāmm*) or contributory (*nāqiṣ*) kind—depend upon its effect to be uncovered and made manifest. As we have already said, God's being pleased is one of His attributes of act which derives from His comprehensive knowledge of righteous deeds and that with which He will reward and recompense the doer of these deeds. In this context, His satisfaction emanates from His knowledge of what is in their hearts, His sending down of composure upon them, His rewarding them with a victory near-at-hand and the abundant spoils they will win.

So when He says *He knew what was in their hearts…* this follows from His saying *God was certainly pleased with the faithful…* to show the nature of this divine satisfaction and reveal the collection of the affairs whose realization represents the realization of this satisfaction.

So He sent down composure on them follows from *He knew what was in their hearts…*, as does the semantically connected phrase *and requited them with a victory near at hand.*

From the context, this *victory near at hand* would be the victory over Khaybar and the *abundant spoils that they will capture* refers to the spoils of Khaybar. It is said: *A victory near at hand* means the capture of Mecca. However, the context does not support this reading.

…and God is all-mighty, all-wise: His will triumphs over everything and He always acts with a purpose, never haphazardly.

وَعَدَكُمُ اللَّهُ مَغَانِمَ كَثِيرَةً تَأْخُذُونَهَا فَعَجَّلَ لَكُمْ هَٰذِهِ وَكَفَّ أَيْدِيَ
النَّاسِ عَنْكُمْ وَلِتَكُونَ آيَةً لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَيَهْدِيَكُمْ صِرَاطًا مُسْتَقِيمًا ﴿٢٠﴾

(48:20) ***God has promised you abundant spoils which you will capture. He has expedited this one for you, and withheld men's hands from you, and so that it may be a sign for the faithful, and that He may guide you to a straight path.***

These *abundant spoils* refer to the spoils that the faithful will capture after their return from Ḥudaybiyyah, and this includes those of Khaybar and other expeditions also. So when God says *He has expedited this one for you*, this refers to the spoils promised in the previous verse, which are specifically the spoils of Khaybar. It is mentioned specifically because of the fact it will happen soon in the future. This reading assumes that both these verses were revealed together.

However, it has also been suggested that this verse was revealed after the capture of Khaybar, in which case the meaning of *this one* is obvious. However, the most common opinion is that this sūrah was revealed in its entirety as the Prophet was returning from Ḥudaybiyyah, while he was still en-route to Medina.

It is also said: *This one* refers to the pledge of allegiance that his companions gave beneath the tree. As you can see, this is a weak opinion.

…and withheld men's hands from you: It is said: *men* refers to the tribes of Asad and Ghatafān who intended to launch an attack on the possessions and families of the Muslims in Medina after the Prophet departed for Khaybar. But God cast fear into their hearts and withheld their hands from them.

It is said: It refers to Mālik b. ʿAwf and ʿUyaynah b. Ḥaṣīn with the tribes of Asad and Ghatafān who came to assist the Jews of Khaybar, but God cast fear into their hearts and they returned.

It is also said: *Men* refers to the Meccans and their allies because they did not fight the Prophet but agreed to the treaty instead.

…and so that it may be a sign for the faithful…: The conjunction *and* connects this to an implicit meaning, namely: God promised them this reward, a reward of victory and abundant spoils both in the short-term and the long-term, for such-and-such beneficial reasons (*maṣāliḥ*), *and so that it may be a sign for the faithful*. Meaning: To show they that they are upon the truth, that their Lord's promise is true and that their Prophet is truthful in what he conveys to them.

This sūrah includes a number of prophecies about the future which contain guidance for the Godwary. For example, when God says: *The*

Bedouins who were left behind will tell you, "Our possessions and our families kept us occupied…" (48:11), and *Those who were left to stay behind will say, when you set out…* (48:15), and *Say to the Bedouins who were left to stay behind, "You will be called…"* (48:16), as well as the promises of victory and spoils in these verses. Then again when He says below: *And others which you have not yet captured…* (48:21) and *Certainly God has fulfilled His Messenger's vision* (48:27).

…and that He may guide you to a straight path…: This is joined to the previous sentence *and so that…*—In other words: So that He may guide you to a straight path, which is the path leading to the highest word of Truth and the spread of the religion. It is said: It means trust in God and relying upon Him in all of your actions. However, what we have mentioned accords better with the context.

وَأُخْرَىٰ لَمْ تَقْدِرُوا عَلَيْهَا قَدْ أَحَاطَ اللَّهُ بِهَا ۚ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرًا ﴿٢١﴾

(48:21) ***And others which you have not yet captured: God has comprehended them, and God has power over all things.***

In other words, other spoils which you have not yet won; God has encompassed them with His power, and God has power over all things.

Others is the subject of the sentence. *Which you have not yet captured* is an adjective for this subject. *God has comprehended them* is the second predicate. The first predicate is implicit. The implicit meaning of this verse is: "And there are other spoils which God has comprehended."

It is said: *others* is in the accusative (*naṣb*) because it is joined to the words in the previous verse: *He has expedited this one for you*. In other words: "God has expedited this one for you and others too."

It is also said: It is in the accusative because it is the object of an implicit verb, whose meaning is: "And He decreed other spoils for you."

It is said: It is in the genitive (*jarr*) with the implicit "many" (*rubba*),[1] that is, "and many other spoils" (*rubba ghanaʾim ukhrā*).

However all of these readings suffer from weakness in one way or another.

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1 This is because the preposition *rubba* is always followed by an indefinite genitive noun. [Trans.]

These other spoils mentioned in the verse are said to refer to the spoils of the Hawāzin tribe. It has also been suggested that they refer to the spoils of Persia and Rome. Another opinion is that it refers to the capture of Mecca and that "*others*" is actually "another town *which you have not yet captured.*"[1] However the first interpretation is the most appropriate.

وَلَوْ قَاتَلَكُمُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوَلَّوُا الْأَدْبَارَ ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُونَ وَلِيًّا وَلَا نَصِيرًا ﴿٢٢﴾

(48:22) ***If the faithless fight you, they will turn their backs. Then they will not find any protector or helper.***

Here, God informs them that the faithless are too weak to fight the faithful by themselves and that they have no protector to look after their affairs or helper to assist them. In short, He says that they cannot fight you by themselves and none of the Arabs are willing to assist them. This in itself is good news for the faithful.

سُنَّةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلُ ۖ وَلَنْ تَجِدَ لِسُنَّةِ اللَّهِ تَبْدِيلًا ﴿٢٣﴾

(48:23) ***God's precedent that has passed before, and you will never find in God's precedent any change.***

This is an absolute object (*mafʿūl muṭlaq*) for an implicit verb, namely God's precedent has been laid down (*sanna sunnat allāh*). This means that God's precedent since time immemorial has always been to grant victory to His Prophets and those who believe in them over their enemies amongst the faithless, so long as they are true in their faith and sincere in their intentions. *And you will never find in God's precedent any change*, as God says elsewhere: *Allah has ordained: "I shall surely prevail, I and My Messengers"* (58:21). And the Muslims never suffered any setbacks in their military campaigns except because they contravened God and His Prophet in some way.

وَهُوَ الَّذِي كَفَّ أَيْدِيَهُمْ عَنْكُمْ وَأَيْدِيَكُمْ عَنْهُمْ بِبَطْنِ مَكَّةَ مِنْ بَعْدِ

1 This is possible because the word for "others" (*ukhrā*) in the verse is grammatically feminine singular, which means it could serve as an adjective for a non-human plural noun (such as "spoils"—*ghanāʾim*) or for a feminine singular noun (such as "town"—*qaryah*).

أَنْ أَظْفَرَكُمْ عَلَيْهِمْ ۚ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرًا ﴿٢٤﴾

(48:24) ***It is He who withheld their hands from you, and your hands from them, in the valley of Mecca, after He had given you victory over them, and God sees best what you do.***

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The apparent meaning of withholding the hands of both groups—the Muslims and the idolaters—is the treaty that occurred between them at Ḥudaybiyyah, which is called the *valley of Mecca* because of its proximity to it; in fact, it has even been said that its land is part of that of the sanctuary. What happened is that both groups had been bitter enemies of one another, and the Quraysh had amassed a force of themselves and Abyssinians while the faithful pledged allegiance to the Prophet that they would fight and the Prophet had resolved to confront the Quraysh. But God gave victory to the Prophet and the faithful over the faithless because they had entered the latter's land and taken up positions in their own back yard, and it seemed like the only outcome was to be a battle. But, instead of a battle taking place, God withheld the hands of the faithless from the faithful and those of the faithful from the faithless, after granting them victory over them. And God sees best what they do!

هُمُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَصَدُّوكُمْ عَنِ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَالْهَدْيَ مَعْكُوفًا أَنْ يَبْلُغَ مَحِلَّهُ ۚ وَلَوْلَا رِجَالٌ مُؤْمِنُونَ وَنِسَاءٌ مُؤْمِنَاتٌ لَمْ تَعْلَمُوهُمْ أَنْ تَطَئُوهُمْ فَتُصِيبَكُمْ مِنْهُمْ مَعَرَّةٌ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ ۖ لِيُدْخِلَ اللَّهُ فِي رَحْمَتِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۚ لَوْ تَزَيَّلُوا لَعَذَّبْنَا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا ﴿٢٥﴾

(48:25) ***They are the ones who disbelieved and barred you from the Sacred Mosque, and kept the offering from reaching its destination. And were it not for [certain] faithful men and faithful women, whom you did not know - lest you should trample them, and thus blame for [killing] them should fall on you unawares; [He held you back] so that God may admit into His mercy whomever He wishes. And had they been separate, We would have surely punished the faithless among them with a painful punishment.***

In Arabic, ʿ*ukūf* means to be engaged with a task, while *detained* (*maʿkūf*)—according to what we read in *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*—means

something prevented from going in a direction by keeping in its place. It is from this that the word *iʿtikāf* is derived, which means to reside in a mosque for worship.

So this part of the verse means: The idolaters and the idolaters of Mecca disbelieved and prevented you from entering the Sacred Mosque and detained the offering—which you had driven forth—preventing it from reaching its proper place to be slaughtered. Mecca is where the sacrificial animals for the ʿUmrah are slaughtered, while those of Ḥajj are slaughtered in Mina. The Prophet and his followers had put on *iḥrām* for ʿUmrah and had driven the offerings forth for that purpose.

And were it not for faithful men and faithful women, whom you did not know—lest you should trample them, and thus blame for them should fall on you unawares: To *trample* (waṭʾ) means to crush underfoot, and "blame" (*maʿarrah*) means harm. *Lest you should trample them…* is a permutation (*badal*) of the antecedent of the conditional particle *were it not…*, while the consequent (*jawāb*) of this is implicit, it means: "Were it not for this, we would not have kept your hands off them."

So this part of the verse means: Were it not to avoid you trampling faithful men and women you do not know in Mecca underfoot unawares, and thus being blamed or coming to harm for their deaths, then God would not have kept your hands off them.

So that God may admit into His mercy whomever He wishes: "*So that*" is semantically connected to the implicit consequent, above, meaning: "However, he did keep your hands off them so that He may admit to His mercy those faithful men and women who are not distinguished by keeping them safe from being killed, and that he may admit you to His mercy by protecting you from blame."

It is said: "That He may admit into His mercy those of the disbelievers who embrace Islam after the treaty."

And had they been separate, We would have surely punished the faithless among them with a painful punishment: *Separate* means to be distinct and apart from one another. *They* refers to everyone mentioned above: the faithful and the disbelievers of Mecca. In other words, had they been separated so that the faithful could be distinguished from the faithless, we would have punished those Meccans who disbelieve a painful punishment. But we did not punish them because of the sanctity of the faithful who are in their midst.

إِذْ جَعَلَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الْحَمِيَّةَ حَمِيَّةَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ فَأَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ سَكِينَتَهُ عَلَىٰ رَسُولِهِ وَعَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَأَلْزَمَهُمْ كَلِمَةَ التَّقْوَىٰ وَكَانُوا أَحَقَّ بِهَا وَأَهْلَهَا ۚ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا ﴿٢٦﴾

(48:26) ***When the faithless put belligerence into their hearts, the belligerence of pagan ignorance, God sent down His composure upon His Messenger and upon the faithful, and made them abide by the word of Godwariness, for they were the worthiest of it and were its people, and God has knowledge of all things.***

Al-Rāghib says:

> When the faculty of anger (*al-quwwah al-ghaḍabiyyah*) is inflamed and enlarged, then it is called "belligerence" (*al-ḥimiyyah*). So when you say: "I was belligerent towards so-and-so," it means, "I became angry with him." God says: *the belligerence of pagan ignorance*. And from this, is taken the figure of speech "I defended the place" (*himyat al-makān*).

The time qualifier of *When the faithless put…* is connected to God's saying, above: *and barred you…*

It is said: It is connected to *We would have surely punished…*

It is also said: It is connected to an implicit: "And recall…" (*udhkur*)

Here, *put* is used in the sense of casting into (*ilqāʾ*), *the faithless* are the verb's subject and *belligerence* is its object. *The belligerence of pagan ignorance* clarifies what kind of belligerence it was. *Pagan ignorance* (jāhiliyyah) here is an adjective used in place of the noun it describes, namely *the religion of pagan ignorance*.

Had *put* (jaʿl) been used in the sense of "made", then its second object would have been implicit, the meaning being: When the faithless made belligerence rooted in their hearts.

And the noun *the faithless* is repeated here rather than the pronoun "they" to indicate the reason for the decision expressed in this verse.

So this means: They are the ones who disbelieved and barred you when they put belligerence into their hearts, the belligerence of ignorant pagan religion.

God sent down His composure upon His Messenger and upon the faithful: This follows from *when the faithless put belligerence into their hearts* and it suggests a kind of reciprocity, namely that they put belligerence into

their hearts, so God countered this by sending down composure on His Messenger and the faithful. This calmed their hearts but also prevented them from acting rashly; they showed their composure and steadiness without being impetuous.

And made them abide by the word of Godwariness: In other words, He placed it with them such that it would not separate from them. A number of commentators have said that this *word* is that of Divine Unity (*tawḥīd*), while others have said it means to be steadfast in fulfilling their pledge. It has also been suggested that it refers to the aforementioned composure. It is also said: Rather this refers to the pledge in the World of Particles (*ʿālam al-dharr*), and this is the most foolish interpretation.

It is not unlikely that here God is referring to the spirit of faith (*rūḥ al-īmān*) which bids its possessor to be Godwary, as when God says: *He has written faith into their hearts and strengthened them with a spirit from Him* (58:22), and God has referred to the spirit as a word in the verse: *and His Word that He cast toward Mary and a spirit from Him* (4:171).

For they were the worthiest of it and were its people: They were worthiest of it because they were fully prepared to receive this divine gift as a result of the righteous deeds they had performed, so they were worthier of it than anyone else. As for being its people, this is because they alone were receiving it; it was not found in anyone else. The people of a thing are its exclusive possessors (*khāṣṣah*).

It is said: This means they were worthiest of composure and they were its people.

It is also said: There is an unconventional order of words (*taqaddum wa taʾkhīr*) in this sentence; it actually means: Its people were worthiest of it. And this opinion is as you see it.

And God has knowledge of all things is appended to *for they were the worthiest of it and were its people* or to all of the above, and its meaning is obvious.

لَقَدْ صَدَقَ اللَّهُ رَسُولَهُ الرُّؤْيَا بِالْحَقِّ ۖ لَتَدْخُلُنَّ الْمَسْجِدَ الْحَرَامَ إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ آمِنِينَ مُحَلِّقِينَ رُءُوسَكُمْ وَمُقَصِّرِينَ لَا تَخَافُونَ ۖ فَعَلِمَ مَا لَمْ تَعْلَمُوا فَجَعَلَ مِنْ دُونِ ذَٰلِكَ فَتْحًا قَرِيبًا ﴿٢٧﴾

(48:27) ***Certainly God has fulfilled*** **(laqad ṣadaqa allāh)** ***His Messenger's vision in all truth: You will surely enter the Sacred***

Mosque, God willing, in safety, with your heads shaven or hair cropped, without any fear. So He knew what you did not know, and He assigned besides that a victory near at hand.

It is said: The Arabic verbs *ṣadaqa* (lit. "to confirm") and *kadhiba* (lit. "to refute") are both doubly transitive (that is, they take two direct objects). One can say: *ṣadaqtu zaydan al-ḥadīth* (lit. "I confirmed Zayd [in] speech") or *kadhabtuhu al-ḥadīth* (lit. "I refuted Zayd [in] speech"). They can also take a second object with the preposition "in" (*fī*), as in: *ṣadaqtuhu fī al-hadīth* (lit. "I confirmed him in speech") or the opposite. Meanwhile *ṣaddaqa* and *kadhdhaba* both only take a single object: "I believed/did not believe what he said" (*saddaqtuhu/kadhdhabtuhu fī ḥadīthih*).

The *lām* in *certainly God has fulfilled* is the *lām* of swearing an oath, and the words *You will surely enter the Sacred Mosque* are the object of that oath.

The words *in all truth* (bi al-ḥaqq) are a circumstantial qualifier for the *vision*, while the *bāʾ* is for concomitance.

God makes this dependent upon the Divine Will, saying *God willing*, to educate His servants [that everything is contingent upon the Divine Will].

This renders the meaning: "Certainly God has fulfilled His Messenger's vision which He showed him: O ye faithful! You will certainly enter the Sacred Mosque, God willing, safe from the harm from the idolaters, with shaved heads or hair cropped without any fear of the idolaters."

So He knew what you did not know, and He assigned besides that a victory near at hand—This refers to the above mention of entering the Sacred Mosque in safety. *Besides that* means sooner than that, and the meaning is: God knew the benefit of you entering the Sacred Mosque in safety, which you were unaware of, and that is why He has appointed for you a victory near at hand before you do this, which will make it easy for you to enter.

Hence it is clear that the *victory near at hand* in this verse refers to the victory at Ḥudaybiyyah which prepared the way for the Muslims to enter the Sacred Mosque in safety and made it easy for them. Were it not for that, they could not have entered except by way of fighting and bloodshed, but you cannot perform ʿUmra and fight! So the treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah and its clauses made it possible for them to enter the Mosque to perform ʿUmra in the following year.

Based on this, we can see that reading this verse as referring to the capture of Khaybar does not match the context of the verse. As for the reading

which says it refers to the capture of Mecca, this is even further from it.

The context of the verse suggests that it means to remove doubt from some of those who were with the Prophet. This is because the faithful claimed that because of the Prophet's vision of them entering the Mosque in safety, with shaved heads or cropped hair, that this meant they would enter the Mosque this year. So when they set off to perform ʿUmrah in Mecca, then the idolaters barred their way at Ḥudaybiyyah and prevented them from entering the Sacred Mosque. Some of them doubted the Prophet's vision, so God removed their doubt with this verse.

The key point of the verse is that the Prophet's vision was true; it was shown to him by God, and God fulfilled that vision. *You will surely enter the Sacred Mosque, God willing, in safety, with your heads shaven or hair cropped, without any fear*. But He put off this for a year and brought this victory before it—the treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah—to facilitate your entry because He knew that you would not be able to enter the Sacred Mosque in safety with your heads shaven or cropped and without any fear except in this way.

هُوَ الَّذِىٓ أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُۥ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُۥ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِۦ ۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِاللَّهِ شَهِيدًا ﴿٢٨﴾

(48:28) ***It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the true religion, that He may make it prevail over all religions, and God suffices as witness.***

We already explained the meaning of this when discussing verse 33 of Sūrah al-Tawbah.

And God suffices as witness means as a witness to the veracity of his Prophethood and the promise that His religion will prevail over all religions, or to the veracity of his vision. So this appended sentence is looking to either the same verse or the one before it.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, concerning God's saying: *God was certainly pleased with the faithful…* (48:18), Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātam, and Ibn Mardawayh relate from Salamah b. al-Akwaʿ:
While we were speaking, the crier of God's Messenger called out: "O people! Pledge allegiance! Pledge allegiance! The Holy Spirit

has come down!"

So we hastened to God's Messenger while he was beneath a umbrella thorn tree and pledged allegiance. That is God's saying: *God was certainly pleased with the faithful when they swore allegiance to you under the tree.* And he pledged allegiance on behalf of ʿUthmān with one of his hands upon the other.

The people said: "How nice for Ibn ʿAffān to circumambulate the Kaʿbah while we are still here!"

But God's Messenger told them: "If he stayed like this for a year, he would not circumambulate until I did."

(2) In the same source, ʿAbd b. Ḥamīd, Muslim, and Ibn Mardawayh narrate from Mughfal b. Yassār:

You saw me on the Day of the Tree while the Prophet received the pledge of allegiance from the people, and I held lifted one of its branches off his head. We were fourteen hundred, but we did not pledge allegiance to the death, we pledged allegiance not to run away.

Author's comments: That the believers numbered fourteen hundred on that day is also narrated in other accounts. Some narrations put the number at one thousand three hundred, others at one thousand eight hundred. Equally some say that the pledge was not to flee, while others say it was to the death.

(3) In the same source, Aḥmad b. Jābir and Muslim narrate from Umm Bishr from the Prophet:

None who pledged allegiance beneath the tree will enter hellfire.

(4) In the same source, Ibn Abī Ḥātam narrates from Ibn ʿAbbās, concerning the verse *He knew what was in their hearts, so He sent down composure on them* (48:18):

Composure was only sent down upon those whom God knew would fulfil their pledge.

Author's comments: This narration specifies the one that came before it, and this is demonstrated by God's saying: *Indeed those who swear allegiance to you, swear allegiance only to God: the hand of God is above their hands. So whosoever breaks his oath, breaks it only to his own detriment, and whoever fulfils the covenant he has made with God, He will give him a great reward* (48:10). This makes the condition of God's reward—and, as a corollary, God's satisfaction (*riḍā*)—fulfilling the pledge and not breaking it. Al-Qummī has said this in his *Tafsīr*, and it appears as if it is a narration.

(5) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr* also, concerning God's saying *When the faithless put belligerence in their hearts…* (48:26), Ibn Abī Shaybah, Aḥmad, Bukhārī, Muslim, Nasāʾī, Ibn Jarīr, Ṭabarānī, Ibn Mardawayh, and Bayhaqī (in *Dalāʾil*) narrate that Sahl b. Ḥanīf said at the Battle of Ṣiffīn:

Accuse yourselves! For you saw we desired a treaty on the Day of Ḥudaybiyyah—which was between the Prophet and the idolaters—and if we saw it was going to be a fight, we would have fought.

ʿUmar came to God's Messenger and said: "O Messenger of God! Are we not upon truth and they upon falsehood?"

The Prophet said: "Of course!"

ʿUmar said: "Are our slain not in paradise while theirs are in hell?"

The Prophet said: "Of course!"

ʿUmar said: "Then why are we dishonoring our religion and turning back before God has judged between them and us?"

The Prophet said: "O Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb! I am the Messenger of God and God will never forsake me."

So ʿUmar went distressed and it was not long until he went to Abū Bakr and said: "O Abū Bakr! Are we not upon truth and they upon falsehood?"

Abū Bakr said: "Of course!"

ʿUmar said "Are not our slain in paradise while theirs are in hell?"

Abū Bakr said: "Of course!"

ʿUmar said: "So why are we dishonoring our religion?"

Abū Bakr said: "O Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb! He is the Messenger of God and God will never forsake Him!"

Then Sūrah al-Fatḥ was revealed, so God's Messenger called for ʿUmar and read it to him. He said: "O Messenger of God! And the victory is this?"

The Prophet said: "Yes."

(6) In *Kamāl al-Dīn*, with a chain of narrators via Manṣūr b. Ḥāzim, who narrates from Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq] about God's saying: *And had they been separate, We would have surely punished the faithless among them with a painful punishment* (48:25): Had God extracted the faithful from the descendants of the faithless and the faithless from the descendants of the faithful, God would have punished the faithless.

Author's comments: The same meaning is narrated in other traditions also.

(7) And in the same source, from Jamīl:

I asked Abū ʿAbd Allah [Imām al-Ṣādiq] about the verse: *and made them abide by the word of Godwariness* (48:26).

He said: "It is faith (*īmān*)."

(8) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Tirmidhī, ʿAbd Allah b. Aḥmad (in *Zawāʾid al-Musnad*), Ibn Jarīr, Dārquṭnī (*in al-Ifrād*), Ibn Mardawayh, and Bayhaqī (in *al-Asmāʾ wa al-Ṣifāt*) narrate from Ubayy b. Kaʿb from the Prophet:

And made them abide by the word of Godwariness means: "There is no god but God (*lā ilāha illā allāh*).

Author's comments: This meaning has been narrated via other chains going back to ʿAlī, Salamah b. Akwaʿ, and Abū Hurayrah.

It is also narrated through Shiʿi chains, as we find in *ʿIlal al-Sharāʾiʿ*, with a chain via al-Ḥasan b. ʿAbd Allāh via his forefathers, from his grandfather al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī, from the Prophet who said in a tradition explaining the significance of the words *Subḥān allāh, wa al-ḥamdu lillāh, wa lā ilāha illa allāh, wa allāhu akbar*: "*Lā ilāha illa allāh* means His oneness (*waḥdāniyyah*). God accepts no deeds without this. It is the word of Godwariness by which God makes the scales heavy on the Day of Resurrection."

(9) And in *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, in the account of the conquest of Khaybar, we read:

When God's Messenger came to Medina from Ḥudaybiyyah, he remained there for twenty nights, then set out from there to launch an attack on Khaybar.

And Ibn Isḥāq relates with a chain of narrators going back to Abū Marwān al-Aslamī from his forefather, from his grandfather, who said:

We departed with God's Messenger to Khaybar until we approached and were overlooking it. God's Messenger said: "Stop." So the people stopped.

He said: "O Allah! Lord of the seven heavens and all they shelter! Lord of the seven earths and all they carry! Lord of the devils and all they lead astray! We ask you the good of this town, the good of its people and the good of what it contains. And we seek refuge in you from the evil of this town, the evil of its people and the

evil of what it contains. Go forth, in the name of God!"
And from Salamah b. Akwaʿ:
We went with God's Mesenger to Khaybar travelling by night. Someone told ʿĀmir b. al-Akwaʿ, who was known as a poet: "Will you not let us hear some of your tunes?"
So he began to say:
"O God! Without You, we would not have been guided,
Neither would we have given charity, or prayed,
So please forgive us for our deeds, may we sacrifice for you!
Make our feet firm when we meet our enemy,
And send down composure upon us,
Certainly if they challenge us, We will come,
They have made a hue and cry seeking help against us!"
The Prophet asked: "Who is the [camel] driver (*sāʾiq*) [singing]?"
They said: "ʿĀmir."
The prophet said: "May God have mercy on him!"
ʿUmar, who was on his camel called Wajīb said: "O Messenger of God! Might you not bless us with it?"
And he said that because whenever God's Messenger asked God to forgive a specific person, that person was martyred.
When the battle commenced and the armies were lined up, one of the Jews of Khaybar came out saying: "Khaybar knows that I am Marḥab / a hero well-armed and battle-tested / when war comes spreading its flames."
So ʿĀmir came out to meet him, reciting: "Khaybar knows that I am ʿĀmir / a hero well-armed and daring!"
So they exchanged blows and Marḥab's sword became lodged in ʿĀmir's shield. ʿĀmir leant forward to attack Marḥab's leg, but he stumbled and cut his own artery with the tip of his sword and died.
Some of the companions of God's Messenger said: "ʿĀmir's efforts were futile!" So I went to the Prophet weeping and said: "They say that ʿĀmir's efforts were futile!"
The Prophet asked: "Who said that?"
I said: "Some of your companions."
The prophet said: "They lie. He will be given his reward twofold!"
So we kept fighting them until we were afflicted by severe hunger. Then God granted us victory over it. That happened because

the Prophet gave the battle-standard to ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and a group of people went with him; they encountered the people of Khaybar but were repulsed. They came back to the Prophet calling one another cowards. God's Messenger had been afflicted by a migraine and did not come out to the people, but said when he recovered: "What has happened with Khaybar?" The people informed him [of the reversal] and he said: "Surely I will give the flag tomorrow to a man who loves God and His Messenger and whom God and His Messenger love! He will persevere and not flee; he will not return until God grants him victory!"

Bukhārī and Muslim narrate from Qutaybah b. Saʿīd:

Yaʿqūb recounted to me from ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Iskandarānī from Abū Ḥāzim, that Saʿd b. Sahl had informed him that God's Messenger had said on the Day of Khaybar: "I will surely give this flag tomorrow to a man to whom God will grant victory. He loves God and His Messenger, and God and His Messenger love him." So the people spent the night chattering amongst themselves, wondering if they would be given it. When people awoke the next day, they all went to God's Messenger hoping to be given the flag. He said: "Where is ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib?"

They said: "O Messenger of God, he has a complaint with his eyes."

He said: "So bring him!" ʿAlī was brought and God's Messenger spat in his eyes. He recovered fully, as if there had never been anything wrong, then he gave him the flag.

ʿAlī said: "O Messenger of God, I shall fight them until they become like us."

The Prophet told him: "Move unhurriedly until you reach their yard, then invite them to Islam and inform them of their duties towards God. By God if God guides but a single one of them through you, it is better for you than having many red camels!"[1]

Salamah narrates:

So Marḥab came out saying: "Khaybar knows that I am Marḥab…." Then ʿAlī came out and said: "I am he whose mother named him *ḥaydar* / like a lion of the jungle, fierce in countenance / I repay

1 This is because red camels were highly prized by the Arabs and fetched a high price. [Trans.]

one measure with a multitude!"
He struck Marḥab, splitting open his skull and killing him. And victory was granted by his hand.
The same tradition is brought by Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*.
Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥāfiẓ narrates from Abū Rāfiʿ, the servant of God's Messenger:
We went forth with ʿAlī when God's Messenger sent him against Khaybar. As he approached the fort, its people came out and he fought them. One of the Jews struck him and knocked the shield out of his hand, so he seized the gate of the fort and used it to shield himself. It remained in his hand as he fought until God granted him victory, whereat he dropped it. Eight of us tried to turn over that gate together but we could not manage it!
A chain of narrators from Layth b. Abī Sulaym, from Abu Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿAli:
Jābir b. ʿAbd Allāh told me: "ʿAli lifted the gate on the Day of Khaybar for the Muslims to get through and storm the fort. Later it could not be lifted by forty men!" And another version has also been narrated from Jābir which states that seventy men had to lift it together in order to put it back in its place.
A chain of narrators from ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Laylā:
ʿAlī would wear a thickly padded coat (*qabāʾ maḥshuw thakhīn*) in hot and cold weather, and the heat would not bother him. Some of my companions came to me and said: "We have seen something from the Commander of the Faithful, have you seen it too?"
I said: "What is it?"
They said: "We have seen him come out to us during times of intense heat wearing a thickly padded coat, without the heat bothering him! And during times of extreme cold, he comes out to us wearing two light robes without the cold bothering him! Have you heard anything about this?"
I said: "No."
They said: "Ask your father about it, for he often chats with him."
I asked my father and he said: "I haven't heard anything about it."
So he visited ʿAlī and chatted with him, then he asked him about that. He told my father: "Were you not at Khaybar?"
My father said: "Of course!"
"Didn't you see when God's Messenger called Abū Bakr, gave him

the battle standard and sent him forth; then he went forth and met the enemy but came back with his men, having withdrawn. Then he sent for ʿUmar, gave him the battle standard and sent him forth; then he went forth, met the enemy, fought them but came back again, having withdrawn.

"Then God's Messenger said: 'Today I will give this banner to someone who loves God and His Messenger and whom God and His Messenger love. God will grant us victory by his hands, for he will persevere and will not flee!' Then he called for me and gave me the battle standard, saying: 'O God! Suffice him against heat and cold!' And ever since then I have never found discomfort in heat or cold."

All of this has been transmitted by Imām Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī in his *Dalāʾil al-Nubuwwah*.

Ṭabrisī says:

Then God's Messenger took the forts of Khaybar one after another, winning booty, until they reached the fort of the al-Watīḥ and al-Salālim clans. These were the last of the forts to fall; God's Messenger besieged them for a little over ten nights.

Ibn Isḥāq says:

After the Messenger of God conquered al-Qamūs, the fortress of Ibn Abī al-Ḥuqayq, Ṣafiyyah bt. Ḥuyayy b. Akhṭab was brought to him, and another woman with her. Bilāl, who was the one who brought them, led them past some of the slain Jews. When the woman who was with Ṣafiyyah saw them, she cried out, struck her face, and poured dust on her head. When the Messenger of God saw her, he said, "Take this she-devil away from me!" He commanded that Ṣafiyyah should be kept behind him, and he cast his cloak over her. Thus the Muslims knew that the Messenger of God had chosen her for himself. The Messenger of God said to Bilāl (according to what I have received) when he saw the Jewish woman doing what he saw her do, "Are you devoid of mercy, Bilāl, that you take two women past their slain men?"

When Ṣafiyyah became the bride of Kinānah b. al-Rabīʿ b. Abī al-Ḥuqayq, she dreamt that a moon had fallen into her lap. She told her vision to her husband, and he said, "That is only because you are wishing for the king of the Hijaz, Muḥammad," and he gave her face a slap that blackened her eye. She was brought to

the Messenger of God with the traces of it still there; he asked her what it was, and she told him this story.

Ibn Abī al-Ḥuqayq sent a message to God's Messenger asking permission to come out and parley with him. God's Messenger agreed, so he came and made terms with him; in return for the lives of the fighters in the fortresses and their children, they would leave Khaybar and its land with their children and give God's Messenger whatever property they owned, except for the clothes on their backs. God's Messenger said: "I absolve God and His Messenger of you if you have kept anything hidden from me!" So they agreed on those terms.

When the people of Fadak heard of what they had done, they sent word to the Messenger of God, asking him to banish them and spare their lives, and they would leave him their property; and he did so. Among the men who mediated between them and the Messenger of God in the matter was Muḥayyiṣah b. Masʿūd, a member of the Banū Ḥārithah. When the people of Khaybar surrendered on these terms, they asked the Messenger of God to employ them on the properties for a half share. They said, "We know more about them than you and are better cultivators of them." So the Messenger of God made peace with them for a half share, provided that "if we want to make you leave, we may." The people of Fadak made peace with him on similar terms. Khaybar became the booty (*fayʾ*) of the Muslims; Fadak belonged exclusively to the Messenger of God, because the Muslims had not attacked its people with horses or camels.

When the Messenger of God rested, Zaynab bt. al-Ḥārith, the wife of Sallām b. Mishkam and the niece of Marḥab, served him a roast sheep. She had asked what part of the sheep the Messenger of God liked best and was told that it was the foreleg. So she loaded that part with poison, and she poisoned the rest of the sheep, too. Then she brought it. When she set it before the Messenger of God, he took the foreleg and chewed a bit of it, but he did not swallow it. With him was Bishr b. al-Barāʾ b. Maʿrūr, who, like the Messenger of God, took some of it; Bishr, however, swallowed it, while the Messenger of God spat it out, saying, "This bone informs me that it has been poisoned." Then he summoned the woman, and she confessed.

He asked, "What led you to do this?"
She said: "How you have afflicted my people is not hidden from you. So I said, 'If he is a prophet, he will be informed; but if he is a king, I shall get rid of him.'"
The Prophet forgave her. Bishr b. al-Barāʾ died of the food he had eaten. The mother of Bishr b. al-Barāʾ had come in to visit the Messenger of God during his final illness. He told her: "Umm Bishr, at this very moment I feel my aorta being severed because of the food I ate with your son at Khaybar." The Muslims believed that in addition to the honour of prophethood that God had granted him the Messenger of God died a martyr.

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Verse 29

This verse concludes the sūrah by describing the Prophet and those with him with the description given for them in the Torah and Injīl and gives a beautiful promise of divine reward to those of them who are faithful and do righteous deeds. It is also connected to the verses that came before it because it says that God sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth.

مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ۚ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ أَشِدَّاءُ عَلَى الْكُفَّارِ رُحَمَاءُ بَيْنَهُمْ ۖ تَرَاهُمْ
رُكَّعًا سُجَّدًا يَبْتَغُونَ فَضْلًا مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانًا ۖ سِيمَاهُمْ فِي وُجُوهِهِمْ مِنْ
أَثَرِ السُّجُودِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ مَثَلُهُمْ فِي التَّوْرَاةِ ۚ وَمَثَلُهُمْ فِي الْإِنْجِيلِ كَزَرْعٍ أَخْرَجَ
شَطْأَهُ فَآزَرَهُ فَاسْتَغْلَظَ فَاسْتَوَىٰ عَلَىٰ سُوقِهِ يُعْجِبُ الزُّرَّاعَ لِيَغِيظَ بِهِمُ
الْكُفَّارَ ۗ وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ مِنْهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا
عَظِيمًا ﴿٢٩﴾

(48:29) ***Muḥammad, the Messenger of God, and those who are with him are hard against the faithless and merciful amongst themselves. You see them bowing and prostrating, seeking God's grace and pleasure. Their mark is on their faces, from the effect of prostration. Such is their similitude in the Torah and their similitude in the Injīl. Like a tillage that sends out its shoots and builds them up, and they grow stout and settle on their stalks, impressing the sowers, so that He may enrage the faithless by them. God has promised those who have faith and do righteous deeds of them forgiveness and a great reward.***

Muḥammad is the subject of the sentence and *the Messenger of God* is an explanatory conjunction, adjective, or permutative of this subject. The phrase *those who are with him* is semantically joined to the subject, and *hard against the faithless…* is the predicate.

…and those who are with him are hard against the faithless and merciful amongst themselves is a subject and predicate. This statement is meant

to describe those who are with the Prophet, and the hardness and mercy mentioned are some of their qualities.

The fact that *…and merciful amongst themselves* follows *are hard against the faithless* is meant to dispel the notion that their hardness towards the faithless might entail some harshness amongst themselves. Together, these two phrases show us that their approach with the faithless is hardness while with the faithful amongst themselves it is mercy.

You see them bowing and prostrating… means that they maintain the prayer, and the verb *you see them* indicates that this is their continuous practice. In other words, they pray regularly. This sentence is a second predicate that follows on from the first one for *those who are with him*.

Seeking God's Grace and pleasure—Grace (faḍl) means a gift, referring to His reward, and *pleasure* (riḍwān) is more powerful in meaning than "satisfaction" (*riḍā*).

Their mark is on their faces—"mark" (*sīmā*) means sign (*ʿalāmah*); this phrase is the both the subject and predicate of the sentence. *…from the effect of prostration* is a circumstantial qualifier of an implicit pronoun (*ḍamīr mustakin*) in the predicate, or an exposition of what their *mark* is. In other words, the fact that they prostrate to God out of fear and humility shows in their faces; this is through the mark of being God-fearing and they are known to anyone who sees them. A similar meaning is narrated from Imām al-Ṣādiq who says that this refers to wakefulness in prayer (*al-sahr fī al-ṣalāt*).[1]

It is said: This refers to the mark of the dust upon their foreheads because they would only prostrate upon soil, not on clothing.

And it is said: This means a mark on their faces on the Day of Judgement because the place where they prostrated on that day will become bright and luminous.

Such is their similitude in the Torah and their similitude in the Injīl: *Similitude* (mathal) means their description. In other words: "The way in which we described them (being hard on the faithless and merciful amongst themselves, for example) is how we described them in the scriptures of the Torah and the Injīl." So *Their similitude in the Injīl* is semantically connected to *their similitude in the Torah*.

However, it is also said that *And their similitude in the Injīl…* is actually

1 This is narrated by Ṣādūq in his *Faqīh* and by Mufīd in *Rawḍat al-Wāʿiẓīn* in a *mursal* tradition from ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sinān.

a new sentence that is detached from whatever came before it. In other words it is a subject of a new sentence and its predicate is: *Like a tillage that sends out its shoots*…. This means that their description in the Torah is that they are harsh on the faithless, merciful amongst themselves and that prostration has marked their faces, while their description in the Injīl is that they are like a tillage that sends out its shoots… etc.

Like a tillage that sends out its shoots and builds them up, and they grow stout and settle on their stalks, impressing the sowers…: A plant's *shoots* (shatʾ) refers to its fresh sprouts which are produced from it and grow around it; building them up means to assist them; growing stout means to become thick and coarse.

This means that they are like a tillage that sends out fresh sprouts, supports them and, as a result, these sprouts thicken and settle firmly upon stalks, impressing the sowers with their maturity. This alludes to the fact that with each passing day the faithful are becoming more numerous, more powerful and more prepared. That is why God adds at the end: … *so that He may enrage the faithless by them.*

God has promised those who have faith and do righteous deeds of them forgiveness and a great reward: The pronoun in *of them* refers to *those who are with him*, above. Based on the apparent meaning such a sentence structure would normally yield, *of* (min) is to indicate partiality. This means that God's forgiveness and great reward are both contingent upon a person's continuing faith and righteous deeds. So if there are any amongst them who do not have faith, such as the hypocrites whose hypocrisy is not known (such as those whom God refers to in the verse *There are hypocrites among the Bedouins around you and among the townspeople of Medina, steeped in hypocrisy. You do not know them; We know them*, 9:101), or someone who believes now but later reverts to polytheism and disbelieves (such as those mentioned in the verse *Indeed those who turned their backs after the guidance had become clear to them…If We wish, We will show them to you so that you recognize them by their mark*, 47:30), or someone who believes but does not act righteously (as we might deduce from the verses about perfidy, the verse about investigating the report of a profligate, and the like thereof),[1] then these people are also excluded

1 One of the people of perfidy (*ahl al-ifk*) is a Companion who is a veteran of the Battle of Badr. God says: *Indeed those who accuse honourable and unwary faithful women shall be cursed in this world and the Hereafter, and there shall*

from the promise of forgiveness and great reward.

We have already seen a similar proviso laid down in this sūrah when God said: *Indeed those who swear allegiance to you, swear allegiance only to God: the hand of God is above their hands. So whosoever breaks his oath, breaks it only to his own detriment, and whoever fulfils the covenant he has made with God, He will give him a great reward* (48:10). And this is further supported by Ibn ʿAbbās' understanding of the verse: *He knew what was in their hearts, so He sent down composure on them…* (48:18) when he interpreted it, saying: "He only sent down composure on those whom he knew would fulfil their pledge…" (see above).

Another verse we find that lays down such a condition is *God has promised those of you who have faith and do righteous deeds that He will surely make them successors in the earth… And whoever is ungrateful after that—it is they who are the transgressors* (24:55).

Regarding the present verse, it is said that *of* (*min*) is expository (*bayāniyyah*) rather than expressing partiality (*tabʿīḍ*), in which case it implies the exact opposite; namely that this promise includes all of those who are with him! However, we must reject this reading because—as it is said—an expository *min* is never followed by a pronoun in grammatical Arabic.

The proponents of this reading might adduce the verse *And had they been separate, We would have surely punished the faithless among them with a painful punishment* (48:25) to support their position, saying that the pronoun *they* in *had they been separate* refers to the faithful, while *them* in *among them* refers to the faithless. However, we have already seen in the commentary on this verse that both of these pronouns refer to the faithful and the faithless inhabitants of Mecca, so the *min* in that verse is also used to express partiality.

Even then, if the promise of forgiveness or this forgiveness itself applied categorically and unconditionally to all of *those who are with him* without any requirement of faith or righteous behavior, meaning that they would all be forgiven whether they were faithful, idolaters, righteous or

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be a great punishment for them (40:23); and the one about whom the verse came down: *O you who have faith! If a profligate should bring you some news, verify it* (49:6), referring to Walid ibn ʿUqbah, a Companion whom God called profligate (*fāsiq*). And God has also said: *But even if you are reconciled to them God shall not be reconciled to the transgressing lot* (9:96).

sinful, this would lead to an obvious absurdity; it would mean that all religious obligations would be rendered pointless for them and their moral accountability would be removed. This is something clearly impossible according to the Qur'an and Sunnah, so the requirement of faith and righteous behavior would be inherently valid, even if God did not mention it! After all, God has said about His Prophets: *But were they to ascribe any partners [to Him], what they used to do would not avail them* (6:88). So if this is the condition of the Prophets, who are infallible (*maʿṣūm*), then what about everyone else?

Poser: Making forgiveness and a great reward conditional upon faith and good works is a common sense condition, as has been mentioned, and there is no way to deny it. However, the context of what He said: *God has promised those who have faith and do righteous deeds of them…* shows that they do have faith and righteous behavior; in other words, this testifies to their having met this requirement. This is especially so considering that *of them* is mentioned after *those who have faith and do righteous deeds* because this demonstrates that they cannot be separated from righteous conduct, unlike (as some scholars have pointed out) the verse in Sūrah al-Nūr, which says: *God has promised those of you who have faith and do righteous deeds that He will surely make them successors…* (24:55). This is further supported by God's praise of them: *You see them bowing and prostrating, seeking God's grace and pleasure* as this shows that their behavior is continuous and ongoing.

Reply: First, as for *of them* being mentioned after *those who…*, this is not to indicate that righteous conduct cannot be separated from them, as the subject of this proposition is the group of *those who have faith and do righteous deeds*, as faith alone in the absence of righteous deeds will not engender forgiveness and reward. Then, when God says *of them*, this is connected to the category as a whole and, therefore, it is proper to mention it after the category of *those who have faith and do righteous deeds*. As for the position of the pronoun being brought forward in the verse *God has promised those of you who have faith and do righteous deeds that He will surely make them successors…* this is because its context is one of giving glad tidings to the faithful, and it is more appropriate to specify whom this good news is being addressed to so that they will be encouraged to pay attention and receive the good news.

Second, as for the fact that God's saying *You see them bowing and prostrating…* denotes continuity, this only refers to what has already passed

until that present moment; it says nothing about the future. And the objection that the religious rules would become pointless for them only applies to their future behavior, rather than their behavior in the past. After all, forgiving past sins does not suggest that one's moral culpability has been suspended; if anything, it only serves to reaffirm its effectiveness. Meanwhile the opposite is true when it comes to completely forgiving someone's future sins, as this cannot coexist with a person being under a moral obligation to obey God, therefore they are no longer under any moral obligation and this is certainly false, because if the removal of moral obligations means that there is no longer any such thing as a sin, and if there is no such thing as a sin then what is there for God to forgive? In other words, if we assume the existence of such a form of forgiveness, this implies that there is no forgiveness, leading to a logical contradiction.

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Chapter 49

Sūrah al-Hujarāt

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Verses 1–10

بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

This sūrah details the aspects of Islam's teachings (*sharāʾiʿ al-dīn*) that are essential for providing a happy life for the individual and supporting a good and virtuous social order. These teachings include the proper etiquette for a servant to observe with God and with His Messenger, which we find in the five opening verses of the sūrah; then there are those which relate to how the human being interacts with others of his kind in the context of communal life; and those which relate to the superiority of individuals within that community, which is one of the most important aspects of how civil society is organized. All of these teachings are intended to guide the human being to live a happy, pleasant and wholesome life, and this is one of the ways in which the Religion of Truth is distinguished from all other social and legal systems. The sūrah concludes by alluding to the essence of faith and submission (*islām*), and God extols the blessing of faith, which is a light that emanates from Him.

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Sūrah al-Ḥujarāt was revealed in Medina, as is attested to by the content of its verses. An exception to this is said to be the verse *O mankind! Indeed We created you from a male and a female...* (49:13), which we will discuss later.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تُقَدِّمُوا بَيْنَ يَدَيِ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ۖ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١﴾

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(49:1) ***O you who have faith! Do not venture ahead of God and His Messenger, and be wary of God. Indeed God is all-hearing, all-knowing.***

Ahead of (bayna yaday) means "in front of" and this is a common

figure of speech or turn of phrase. That it is added to God and His Messenger together and not the Messenger alone shows that this is something that both God and His Messenger share, namely the station of governance (*ḥukm*). This station is reserved for God and (by His permission) the Messenger, as God says elsewhere: *Sovereignty belongs only to God* (12:40), and God says: *We did not send any Messenger but to be obeyed by God's leave* (4:64).

This is further attested to by introducing the prohibition with the phrase *O you who have faith!* and following it with *…and be wary of God. Indeed God is all-hearing, all-knowing.* Hence it is apparent that by *ahead of* God and His Messenger this means the station that connects those who are Godwary and faithful with God and His Messenger, namely the station of governance from which they take their rules of doctrine and practice.

With this in mind, it becomes clear that when God says *Do not venture ahead…* it means do not place any rule ahead of the rule of God and His Messenger, whether by rushing to give one's own opinion on a matter before referring to what God and His Messenger have said about it, or taking an action before receiving a command to do so from God and His Messenger. However, following this prohibition with the phrase *indeed God is all-hearing, all-knowing* correlates with it relating to opinions rather than actions, and rather than actions and opinions together. Otherwise, it would have been said, "indeed God is all-hearing, all-seeing" juxtaposing "all-hearing" (*samīʿ*) with speech and "all-seeing" (*baṣīr*) with actions, just as we often find God say regarding people's behavior: *and God sees best what you do* (57:4).

In short, this verse means: Do not pronounce judgement on a matter in which God and His Messenger have a say until God and His Messenger have issued their verdict. In other words, do not rule except by the rule of God and His Messenger, and distinguish yourselves with obedience and devotion to what they have said.

Consider also that the human being's each and every action or inaction (*fiʿl wa tark*) is not without a rule governing it (even if that rule is mere permissibility). Consider also that even the will or resolve to act or not to act is itself a kind of action, and as such as a rule that pertains to it. The prohibition against going ahead of God and His Messenger forbids anyone from hastening to give an opinion which they had not heard from God and His Messenger, or to undertake a course of action, or even to resolve upon undertaking one without receiving a rule from God and His Messenger.

This means this verse approximates the meaning of God's description of the angels: *Rather they are [His] honoured servants. They do not venture to speak ahead of Him, and they act by His command* (21:26–27).

This kind of obedience encouraged by the present verse, *Do not venture ahead of God and His Messenger*, means to enter God's guardianship (*wilāyah*), stand in the position of servitude and follow its course. The servant does this by bringing his will into accordance with God's will at the level of legislation (*tashrīʿ*) just as it accords with His at the level of creation (*takwīn*). God says: *But you do not wish unless it is wished by God* (76:30), *and God is the guardian of the faithful* (3:68); *indeed the wrongdoers are allies of one another, but God is the guardian of the Godwary* (45:19).

Some scholars have offered alternative interpretations of *Do not venture ahead of God and His Messenger*.

For example: They say *venture ahead* (taqdīm) means to go ahead themselves (*taqaddum*) rather than putting something else before them. This renders the meaning of *Do not venture ahead of God and His Messenger* as follows: Do not hasten to give commands or prohibitions without God and His Messenger and do not be certain of commands or prohibitions with God and His Messenger. Perhaps it could be said that *venture ahead* is used in its conventional sense here, but without specifying its objects—as when God says: *He gives life and brings death* (57:2) without specifying what He gives life and death to—in which case the present verse merely means anything going ahead of another, in which case its meaning becomes the same as *taqaddum*.

They say that the utterance is categorical (*muṭlaq*), encompassing "venturing ahead" whether in words or deeds, even venturing ahead of the Prophet in walking or sitting; performing time-dependent obligations ahead of their time; and other such things.

Another interpretation is that this verse prohibits speaking before the Messenger of God. For example, if you were seated in a gathering and he was asked a question, do not give an answer before he has answered first.

Still another interpretation is that it prohibits hastening to speech or action without him commanding you to do so.

Yet another is that you should not put your speech or actions in front of the speech and actions of the Prophet, so none should walk in front of him.

However, it is clear that we can only explain the phrase *do not venture ahead of God and His Messenger* according to one of the latter three

interpretations—which restrict it to venturing ahead of God's Messenger alone—if we say that God is only mentioned in this verse to honour the Prophet, as when you might say: "Zayd and his generosity impressed me" (*aʿjabanī zayd wa karamuhu*). This means God is mentioned to show that venturing ahead of the Prophet in any way, shape or form is tantamount to venturing ahead of God Himself.

Hopefully, however, by pondering on what we have already mentioned above will prevent you from inclining to any of these erroneous interpretations.

…and be wary of God. Indeed God is all-hearing, all-knowing: This phrase bids the faithful to Godwariness in the position of obedience and servanthood. There is no grace for the human being save that of servanthood, which is why God uses the term "wariness" (*taqwā*).

When He says *Indeed God is all-hearing, all-knowing*, this explains the rationale behind the prohibition and being wary of it. In other words: "Be wary by observing this prohibition, so do not venture ahead with an opinion on your tongues or in your hearts, because God is all-hearing—He hears your words—and all-knowing—He knows your outward and inward aspects, what you announce and what you keep secret."

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَرْفَعُوا أَصْوَاتَكُمْ فَوْقَ صَوْتِ النَّبِيِّ وَلَا تَجْهَرُوا لَهُ بِالْقَوْلِ كَجَهْرِ بَعْضِكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ أَنْ تَحْبَطَ أَعْمَالُكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٢﴾

(49:2) ***O you who have faith! Do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet, and do not speak aloud to him as you shout to one another, lest your works should fail without your being aware.***

This is because when they would speak to him and address him, their voices would be raised louder above his, and this shows—as has been said—one of two things: Either they held him in some sort of disdain—which is disbelief (*kufr*)—or they displayed poor manners towards him considering his position—and this goes against the proper respect and reverence they have been commanded to display to him.

God says *…and do not speak aloud to him as you shout to one another* because one way in which you show reverence to a person whom you are addressing is by lowering your voice so that it is softer than that of theirs.

In other words, raising your voice when addressing someone means you are not showing reverence, hence speaking loudly to people worthy of respect in the same manner as you would speak to anyone else represents poor manners and insolence.

…that your works should fail without your being aware means "lest your works should fail." This is connected to both of the above prohibitions, namely do not raise your voice above his and do not speak loudly to him as you shout to one another or else your works will fail as a result and without you realizing. So both of these actions contain a failure of works (*ḥabṭ*)—a concept which we discussed in the second volume of this work.[1]

Some have suggested that the clause *that your works should fail* explains the rationale for that which is prohibited, namely raising one's voice and shouting. In other words: "That action is forbidden because your works will fail." The difference between reading this as a rationale for the prohibition (*taʿlīl li al-nahī*) and a rationale for the prohibited act (*taʿlīl li al-munhī ʿanhu*) is that the prohibited act is explained by the rationale in the first instance, while it is the outcome that is actually being prohibited in the second. However, this a rather tortuous interpretation.

The apparent meaning of the verse is that raising one's voice above that of the Prophet and speaking loudly to him are both sins which will lead to one's good works failing, so they are sins rather than an act of disbelief (*kufr*) that would cause one's works to fail.

This verse could be read in such a way that "failing" (*ḥabṭ*) means that the act itself is deprived of reward (*thawāb*) rather than it depriving other actions of their reward, as is the case with disbelief. In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, we read:

> Our associates say that the verse *that your works should fail* means lest the reward for that action fails, because had they spoken to the Prophet in a way that showed him respect and reverence, they would have been worthy of reward. However, because they did not, not only has the reward escaped them but they deserve punishment as well. So their works have failed. This verse has nothing to do with the people of the threat (*ahl al-waʿīd*) because, in this verse, God has connected failure to the act itself, while [the masses] interpret it as referring to the one who is worthy of

1 See the exegesis of 2:217, in the third volume of the English translation. [Trans.]

> reward for his actions. However, the latter goes against the apparent meaning of the text.

However, the kind of failing (*ḥabṭ*) connected with disbelief, whose connection with the reward of other deeds is not in doubt, is also connected with the deeds themselves in God's speech, as we see in this verse. Therefore, the two must be read in the same way. Moreover, such a reading does not go against the apparent meaning of the text because the invalidity (*buṭlān*) of an action [entails] the invalidity of its resultant effects (*atharahu al-mutarattib ʿalayh*).

The verse could also be read on the basis that the failing of deeds applies only within the context of faithlessness (*kufr*). This is by saying that raising one's voice over that of the Prophet and speaking to him loudly do not cause deeds to fail in of themselves, but insofar as these behaviors sometimes vex the Prophet, and vexing the Prophet is a form of faithlessness, and faithlessness causes one's good works to fail.

Some interpreters have argued:

> The verse intends to categorically prohibit raising one's voice, while it is known that the operative criterion is forbidding people from actions that can be expected to grieve the Prophet which, it is unanimously agreed, is a kind of faithlessness and causes works to fail. Hence the prohibition is issued against anything that could even be suspected of causing the Prophet grief—whether or not it ultimately does—to decisively put a stop to the matter.

Then, the object of this prohibition is split into two categories: that which reaches the level of faithlessness (*kufr*), which is anything that actually causes him grief, and that which does not. And because there is no means to distinguish between these two categories (and if we posited the existence of one then it would have frequently been ignored), this means that the moral agent (*mukallaf*) must avoid anything of this kind to make sure he does not fall into that which will cause his works to fail, which means anything that reaches the level of giving grief (*adhā*).

It is to this indistinguishability that the Qur'an alludes when it says: *that your works should fail without your being aware.* After all, if raising one's voice and speaking loudly to the Prophet were categorically prohibited, whether it vexed him or not, there would be no need for God to say *without your being aware*. This is because a categorical prohibition would mean that if you raised your voice and grieved him, then this is faithlessness and will definitely cause your works to fail. Even if you did not grieve

him, it would still be a sin, and it would also definitely cause your works to fail. So in either case, your works would fail, in which case God could not support his words by saying *without your being aware*, as you would be indisputably aware of this fact by virtue of the knowledge imparted by the prohibition. This is a summary of what they have said.

However, the apparent meaning of the words—*do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet, and do not speak aloud to him as you shout to one another*—clearly indicates that the real target of the prohibition is the preventing the act itself, making this a prohibition-for-itself (*nahī nafsi*), rather than prohibiting the act in order to prevent its potential consequence—causing grief to the Prophet—which would make it a preliminary prohibition (*nahī muqaddamī*) based on precaution (*iḥtiyāṭ*). However, both of the acts described in the verse are rationally known to be wrong prior to any religious prohibition being promulgated, just like lying and slander. Moreover, those who behaved in this manner were people of faith, as indicated by the introductory clause *O you who have faith!* These persons, even if they could overlook some misdeeds that they considered trivial, would have not been pleased if they knew they were completely invalidating their faith and good works.

This is why God admonishes them by saying *that your works should fail without your being aware*, in other words: "While you do not know the grave and terrible consequences your actions will have, which is none other than the failure of your works. So do not even approach these acts lest your deeds should fail while you are unaware."

So the phrase *without your being aware* is directed to their condition before the divine prohibition, in that they felt that although this was a bad deed, they did not know how bad it was. However, after the prohibition was revealed, they would have certainly been aware of its terrible effects. In one way, this makes the verse similar to the verse of slander (*ayat al-ifk*): *you thought it a light matter, while it was grave with God* (24:15), or when God says in verses about the Day of Resurrection: *and there will appear to them from God what they had never reckoned* (39:47).

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَغُضُّونَ أَصْوَاتَهُمْ عِنْدَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ امْتَحَنَ اللَّهُ قُلُوبَهُمْ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ ۚ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَأَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٣﴾

(49:3) ***Indeed those who lower their voices in the presence of the Messenger of God—they are the ones whose hearts God has tried***

for Godwariness. For them will be forgiveness and a great reward.

"To lower one's voice" (*ghaḍḍ al-ṣawt*) is the opposite of raising it; "to try" (*imtiḥān*) means to put to the test, and it is only used to ascertain the status of a thing previously unknown. However, because this is impossible for God, it means—according to some—to train the heart or subject it to difficulties so that it becomes accustomed to Godwariness.

The context of this verse is the promise of a beautiful reward for those who lower their voices in the presence of God's Messenger having described them as those whose hearts have been tried for Godwariness. And this serves to reaffirm the meaning of the previous verse and encourage people to observe the prohibition it contains.

Referring to the Prophet as the *Messenger of God* in this verse, having referred to him as *the Prophet* in the previous one, alludes to the criterion for this ruling (*milāk al-ḥukm*). In other words, God's Messenger, insofar as he is a messenger (*rasūl*), has no say in the matter; whatever he has comes from the one who sent him (*mursil*). Therefore, respecting and revering a messenger means respecting and revering the one who sent him; so lowering one's voice in the presence of God's Messenger means to magnify and glorify God, and making this one's continuous habit—as we understand from the use of the present-continuous verb *lower* (yaghuḍḍūn)—reveals that such a person has made Godwariness part of their character and that God has tested their hearts for Godwariness.

For them will be forgiveness and a great reward promises them this in return for the Godwariness that is in their hearts. And the outcome will be in favor of Godwariness.[1]

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُنَادُونَكَ مِنْ وَرَاءِ الْحُجُرَاتِ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ ۝٤

(49:4) ***Indeed those who call you from behind the apartments, most of them do not apply reason.***

The context of the verse indicates that this was an occasion on which some uncivilized persons called the Prophet from behind the rooms of his home without concern for proper manners or the duty of respecting

1 An allusion to the verse: *And bid your family to prayer and be steadfast in its maintenance. We do not ask any provision of you. It is We who provide for you, and the outcome will be in favor of Godwariness* (20:132).

him. Therefore God censures them by describing most of them as people who do not apply reason, like beasts.

وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ صَبَرُوا حَتَّىٰ تَخْرُجَ إِلَيْهِمْ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ ۚ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ۝٥

(49:5) ***Had they been patient until you came out for them, it would have been better for them, and God is all-forgiving, all-merciful.***

In other words, had they restrained their calls and not shouted for you until you came to them, this would have been better because it would have displayed good manners and shown that they respect the position of the Prophet. This would have brought them closer to God's forgiveness and mercy because He is all-forgiving and all-merciful.

And God is all-forgiving, all-merciful appears to be directed towards the mention of patience (*ṣabr*) in the same verse, but it could also be directed to the fact that most of them do not apply reason. This would render the meaning: "The ignorance and bad manners they displayed are forgiven because it was not done on the basis of reason and understanding, but rather owing to a lack thereof. And God is all-forgiving, all-merciful."

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنْ جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَإٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَنْ تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصْبِحُوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نَادِمِينَ ۝٦

(49:6) ***O you who have faith! If a profligate should bring you some news, verify! Lest you should visit [harm] on some people out of ignorance, and then become regretful for what you have done.***

It is said that a *profligate* (fāsiq) is someone who has gone out from obedience to sinfulness; *news* (nabaʾ) is an important report; *verify* (tabayyan) means the same as to clarify or check—according to what has been said in the *Ṣiḥāḥ*—and this verb can either be transitive (*mutaʿaddī*) or intransitive (*lāzim*). If it is transitive and takes an object, it means to make clear or make plain, one would say: "I verified the matter, clarified it or checked it" meaning "I made it clear" or "I made it plain." If it is intransitive and does not take an object, then it means to become clear or plain, as in: "The matter became plain" or "the matter became clear."

With this in mind, the verse means: "O you who believe, when a sinner comes to you with an important report, verify his report by investigating it to determine the truth of the matter lest you harm a people out of

ignorance and then become regretful as a result of what you did to them."

In this verse, God approves of acting upon trustworthy reports (*akhbār*), a rational principle upon which rests the very basis of human social life; He commands His listeners to investigate the report of a sinner, which implicitly prohibits them from acting upon it, as it reveals that such a report lacks authoritativeness (*ḥujjiyyah*). At the same time, God also approves of the behavior of rational persons who do not take the word of someone they do not trust or act on the basis of what he tells them.

To explain further: Human life is essentially practical in nature, and the way we live is based on our perceptions of good, evil, benefit and harm, and the opinions we hold. But it is not easy to make judgements about these values except in those areas where we have direct experience. And yet, those things that are connected to our daily lives but are nevertheless hidden from us probably outnumber the former. It is for this reason that we are forced to complement our own experiences with the experiences of others, and there is no way to do this except by hearing their accounts. This is what we mean by a report (*khabar*). Relying on such a report, meaning to act on it and base our behavior on its contents, is something fundamental to our social lives and the practice of most rational persons (*ʿuqalāʾ*).

A report might be *mutawātir*, in which case it is attested to by multiple independent sources, or it might be accompanied by some definitive contextual indicators (*qarāʾin*) which lead us to be sure about its contents. In both of these situations, we would say this report is authoritative (*ḥujjah muʿtabarah*) without hesitation. But if such a report is neither multiply-attested nor accompanied by anything to give us certainty about its contents, then in technical parlance it is called a "solitary report" (*khabar al-wāḥid*). According to scholars of *ḥadīth*, such a report is only authoritative if it comes from a trustworthy source, even if we cannot establish that the content of this individual report is reliable. This because they only act upon what they consider to be real knowledge (that is, trusted knowledge), but probable knowledge that yields conviction (*al-ẓann al-itmiʾnānī*) is usually also considered a kind of knowledge.

With this in mind, when God explains the rationale behind this ordinance, saying: *Lest you should visit [harm] on some people out of ignorance…* this shows that the goal is to remove ignorance (*jahālah*) and attain knowledge through the content of a report that people want to act upon. Therefore, this verse is affirming the approach of rational persons in this regard, making it an endorsement of an existing approach (*imḍāʾ*)

rather than a foundation of a new one (*taʾsīs*).

وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ فِيكُمْ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ۚ لَوْ يُطِيعُكُمْ فِي كَثِيرٍ مِنَ الْأَمْرِ لَعَنِتُّمْ وَلَٰكِنَّ اللَّهَ حَبَّبَ إِلَيْكُمُ الْإِيمَانَ وَزَيَّنَهُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ وَكَرَّهَ إِلَيْكُمُ الْكُفْرَ وَالْفُسُوقَ وَالْعِصْيَانَ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الرَّاشِدُونَ ﴿٧﴾

(49:7) ***And know that the Messenger of God is among you. Should he obey you in many matters, you would surely suffer. But God has endeared faith to you and made it appealing in your hearts, and He has made hateful to you faithlessness, transgression and disobedience. It is such who are the right-minded.***

"To suffer" (*ʿinat*) means sin and destruction, and "to obey" (*ṭāʿah*) means follow. According to what Rāghib has said, obedience usually refers to following someone in a position of authority. However, perhaps it can be reversed to signify the one being followed acting in the way that the follower desires. *Should he obey you…* here is an example of this, in that it calls the Prophet acting in accordance with the whims of the faithful "obedience."

Based on the context, this verse is a continuation of what has been said in the previous one, generalizing its ruling and affirming the rationale given for it. In the previous verse, God instructed His listeners to verify the reports of a sinner, and the reason He gave for this was to avoid acting out of ignorance. Meanwhile, this verse reminds the faithful that God has led them to the path of right-guidance and, in doing so, endeared them to faith by making it seem beautiful to their hearts, while making faithlessness, sinfulness and disobedience detestable to them. Therefore, they should not forget that God's Messenger is amongst them; he is supported by God and upon clear guidance; he only follows the path of right-guidance and never that of perversion. Therefore they should obey his commands, desire what he desires and choose what he chooses; they should not insist that he follow their opinions and whims, because if he obeyed them in many things, they would have become obstinate and perished!

Therefore, *And know that amongst you is the Messenger of God…* is joined to the command in the previous verse …*Verify!* The predicate *amongst you* is brought forward to signify exclusivity and point to the logical consequences of that. In other words, the fact that the Messenger

of God is *only* amongst them means that they should take hold of guidance, avoid going astray, refer all matters to him, obey him and follow in his footsteps. They should not cling to that which their desires lead them.

So the verse means: "Do not forget that God's Messenger is amongst you!" And this is a subtle reminder that they must refer all matters to him and follow his instructions in whatever situation they find themselves in, rather than following their own desires.

When God says *Should he obey you in many matters, you would surely suffer*, this means "you would have toiled and perished." Here, it is as though He is responding to an implicit question: "Why should we refer to him when he does not refer to us or compromise with us?" And He answers: *Should he obey you in many matters, you would surely suffer*.

But God has endeared faith to you and made it appealing in your hearts: This is an addendum to the implications of the previous sentence—*Should he obey you in many matters, you would surely suffer*—namely that they were about to be consigned to perversity and ruin, but God set matters right by blessing them with a love of faith and an aversion to faithlessness, transgression and disobedience.

When God says He endeared faith to them, He means He made it beloved to them. And to make it appealing in their hearts means to make it seem beautiful to them by drawing their hearts towards Him so that they become transfixed by Him and turn away from whatever would distract them from Him.

And He has made hateful to you faithlessness, transgression and disobedience is connected to *endeared*. Making faithlessness and so forth hateful to them means making them dislike it and feel an aversion to it in their psyches. The difference between "transgression" (*fusūq*) and disobedience (*ʿiṣyān*)—according to some—is that *fusūq* means to "go out" from obedience to disobedience, while *ʿiṣyān* is disobedience itself or all forms of sin. It is also said that the meaning of "transgression" in the context of the previous verse refers to deceit, while "disobedience" refers to all other kinds of sin.

It is such who are the right-minded shows that loving faith and being attracted to it and disliking faithlessness, transgression and disobedience are the basis of right-mindedness (*rushd*), which human beings naturally seek as a result of their innate nature (*fiṭrah*) in the same way as they are averse to its opposite, perversity (*ghayy*). Therefore, the faithful must always cling to faith and avoid faithlessness, transgression and

disobedience in order to be right-minded and follow the Messenger rather than their own desires.

As the previous verse explicitly states, this love and attraction to faith and dislike of faithlessness were qualities that only belonged to some of those around the Messenger, rather than all of them. Here, God describes them all in this fashion to maintain their unity and motivate those who have not yet attained these qualities to do so. This, in addition to the tone of the verse and God transitioning from addressing them to address the Prophet by saying: *It is such who are the right-minded*—speaking about those who love faith and find faithlessness, transgression and disobedience hateful serves to praise those who have these qualities and encourage those who do not to try and attain them.

And know that when God says *And know that amongst you is the Messenger of God. Should he obey you in many matters, you would surely suffer*, He is intimating that a group of the faithful insisted on relying on the word of the "profligate" (*fāsiq*) mentioned in the previous verse. This person was al-Walīd ibn ʿUqbah, whom the Prophet had sent to the Banū Muṣṭalaq to collect their alms (*zakāt*). However, when he approached them, he became afraid and returned to Medina and told the Prophet that they had apostatized. Upon hearing this, the Prophet made preparations to confront them, but the above verse was revealed and so he withdrew, although some of his people thought they should have attacked. The full account will be discussed in our study of the traditions below, God-willing.

فَضْلًا مِنَ اللَّهِ وَنِعْمَةً ۚ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٨﴾

(49:8) ***A grace and blessing from God, and God is all-knowing, all-wise.***

This explains why God endeared faith to the faithful, made it appealing to their hearts and made faithlessness, transgression and disobedience hateful to them. In other words, this is purely a gift and a blessing from Him. He did not do it in return for anything that the faithful might do for him. However, this does not mean that this is a random act, because God is all-wise with regards to where He bestows His gifts and blessings and does not do anything without a purpose, as He has said before: *and made them abide by the word of Godwariness, for they were the worthiest of it and deserved it, and God has knowledge of all things* (48:26).

وَإِنْ طَائِفَتَانِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ اقْتَتَلُوا فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَهُمَا ۖ فَإِنْ بَغَتْ
إِحْدَاهُمَا عَلَى الْأُخْرَىٰ فَقَاتِلُوا الَّتِي تَبْغِي حَتَّىٰ تَفِيءَ إِلَىٰ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ ۚ فَإِنْ
فَاءَتْ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَهُمَا بِالْعَدْلِ وَأَقْسِطُوا ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ ﴿٩﴾

(49:9) ***If two groups of the faithful fight one another, make peace between them. But if one party of them aggresses against the other, fight the one which aggresses until it returns to God's ordinance. Then, if it returns, make peace between them fairly, and do justice. Indeed God loves the just.***

Iqtitāl and *taqātul* both mean "to fight one another" in the same way as *istibāq* and *tasābuq* mean "to vie with one another." And the [masculine plural] pronoun of the verb *iqtatalū* ("[they] fight one another") refers to "the two groups" in the sense of their meaning, as each of these two groups is a multitude of persons in its own right. So when you put the two together, you also have a multitude. [Hence the Qur'an uses the masculine plural for all the members of the "two groups" (*ṭāʾifatān*) rather than the dual for the two groups themselves.] On the other hand, the pronoun in make peace between them is dual; again consider the referent [that is to say the two groups, not their members].

It has been related from some commentators about the reason for the discrepancy between these two pronouns [namely why the first one is plural and the second is dual]: "When they are fighting, they are mixed together in one mass, which is why the plural pronoun is used, while when peace is made between them, they are two distinct groups, which is why the dual is employed."

But if one party of them aggresses against the other, fight the one which aggresses until it returns to God's ordinance: "To aggress" (*baghī*) means to show unjustified hostility or to do wrong to another, the word *fayʾ* signifies "to return", while "God's ordinance" (*amr allāh*) means that which God has commanded. The phrase means: "If one of the two groups attacks the other unjustly, then fight the aggressing party until it comes back to what God has commanded and obeys His rule."

Then, if it returns, make peace between them fairly… meaning if the aggressing party comes back to God's command, then make peace between the two groups. However, this does not mean to make peace merely in the sense laying down arms and ceasing hostilities; rather it means peace

garbed in justice. In other words, a peace based on implementing God's laws to deal with the violence wrought by the aggressor in blood, honour, property or any other right that has been infringed upon.

…and do justice. Indeed God loves the just: To do justice (*iqsāṭ*) means to give each person the share to which they are entitled and to act fairly. The phrase *…and do justice* is connected to *make peace between them fairly…* and this links an absolute statement (*muṭlaq*) to a qualified one (*muqayyad*), which signifies emphasis in this case. *Indeed God loves the just* explains the rationale for this, which is emphasis upon emphasis. So it could be read as: "Make peace between them justly and always do justice in everything because God loves those who are just because of their justice."

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

(49:10) ***The faithful are indeed brothers. Therefore make peace between your brothers and be wary of God, so that you may receive mercy.***

This is a new statement that affirms what has been said above about making peace between the two warring groups of the faithful. Limiting the relationship between the faithful to that of brotherhood is a preliminary to the injunction: *Therefore make peace between your brothers….* In other words, the two sides must make peace with each other because of the relationship of brotherhood that exists between them, and those who make peace between them do so because they are brothers of both sides. Therefore it is their duty to strive for peace.

God did not say: "Therefore make peace between the brothers" but instead said *your* brothers because this is a more succinct and profound expression, as it not only suggests that two groups must make peace because they are brothers, but also that the rest of the faithful are their brothers and must work to make peace between them also.

…and be wary of God, so that you may receive mercy is an admonition to both the warring groups and the peacemakers.

A Discussion on the Meaning of "Brothers"

Know that when God says *the faithful are indeed brothers*, this is a legislative declaration (*jaʿal tashrīʿī*) that establishes the relation of brotherhood

between the faithful. This relation has both moral and legal consequences. We have already seen in previous discussions that being a parent, sibling or any other kind of relation can either be a matter of established convention which laws and moral codes treat as having specific legal consequences such as inheritance, the duty of maintenance and being an impediment to marriage, and so on. It can also be a matter of nature, meaning consanguinity; or it can be a matter of both nature and convention.

A conventional relationship is conceptually distinct from a natural relationship. The two can coexist, as when two brothers are born in wedlock to the same parents. They can also differ, as when a natural son is born out of wedlock, he is not considered a son in Islam and he does not belong to his progenitor, even if he is a natural son. Another example is that of an adopted son who is treated as a son by law even if he is not a natural son.

This conventional meaning (*al-maʿnā al-iʿtibārī*) might be used with the intent that some aspects of the real meaning (*ḥaqīqah*) will be applied to its referent, such as when a person is said to be the "head" of his people. This signifies that his relation to them is like that of the head to the body; he organizes their affairs and judges between them in the same way as the head governs the body. However, the extent to which the conventional meaning shares in the attributes of the real one is determined by exigency (*maṣlaḥah*); this might require that the conventional meaning has the full effect of the real meaning, in which case it does, or it might only require that the conventional meaning shares only certain effects of the real one, in which case only those certain effects apply. For instance, we say that recitation (*qirāʾah*) is a part (*juzʾ*) of the prayer (*ṣalāh*); however, when a real part of something disappears, the entire whole must disappear with it, but if recitation is omitted from prayer, then that prayer is not invalidated if this omission was due to a lapse (*sahw*); the prayer is only invalid if this omission was deliberate.

Therefore, it is also possible that the effects of the conventional meaning might differ between the different contexts in which it is used. For instance, bowing (*rukūʿ*) is a part (*juzʾ*) of the prayer and the prayer is invalidated if it is added or omitted, whether deliberately or otherwise. On the other hand, as we have just seen, recitation is also a part of the prayer but does not necessarily invalidate it by being omitted. So it is possible that the force of the conventional meaning might differ from one context to another. However, the force of the conventional meaning only applies

to instances of convention. For instance, a person disposes of his wealth not insofar as he is a human being but insofar as he is its owner. In the same vein, one brother inherits from another in Islam not because he is a brother by nature and shares one or both parents with the deceased, as this is true of an illegitimate child (*walad al-zinā*) but even so the latter does not inherit. Rather one brother inherits from another because he is a brother in the eyes of the Law (*al-sharīʿah al-islāmiyyah*).

So "brotherhood" can have different meanings dependent upon the context in which it is used. There is a natural brotherhood which has no legal bearing, such as two persons sharing one or both parents. There is also conventional brotherhood with conventional legal consequences; in Islam, brotherhood has consequences for marriage and inheritance. There is also milk-brotherhood (*ukhuwwah riḍāʿiyyah*) which has legal consequences for marriage but not inheritance. Meanwhile religious brotherhood has social consequences but no effect on matters of marriage or inheritance. We will look at the words of Imām al-Ṣādiq: "The believer is the brother of the believer, his eye and his guide. He does not betray him, wrong him, defraud him, nor promise something to him only to break it."

This meaning has eluded some commentators who have said that "brotherhood" is used here in a figurative sense. They say it is a metaphor that compares sharing the same faith to sharing the same parents because both of them are sources of life; a person's parents are the source of his life in this world, while his faith is the source of his eternal life in the gardens of Paradise. Alternatively, some say that it is an eloquent analogy in that the faithful all belong to a single origin, namely faith which gives them eternal life.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, about the phrase *O you who have faith!* (49:1), it is narrated from Zurārah from Abū Jaʿfar [Imām al-Bāqir]: No swords were drawn, nor lines arraigned for prayer or war, nor *adhān* pronounced aloud, nor were the words *O you who have faith!* (*yā ayyuhā alladhīna āmanū*) sent down by God before the sons of the Aws and the Khazraj submitted to Islam.

Author's comments: It is also narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās: "*O you who have faith!* was only revealed in Medina, and *O mankind!* was only revealed in Mecca." Some scholars have hesitated about its latter half. The reader should be aware that there are narrations in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* and *Tafsīr*

al-Qummī about the occasion of revelation for the verse *Do not venture ahead of God and His Messenger…* that do not appear fully appropriate to the verse. We have omitted these, but interested readers can refer to the sources for them.

(2) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Aḥmad, Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Yaʿlā, Baghawī in *Muʿjam al-Ṣaḥābah*, Ibn Mundhir, Ṭabrānī, Ibn Mardawayh and Bayhaqī in *al-Dalāʾil* narrate from Anas:

When the verse came down: *O you who have faith! Do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet… without your being aware* (49:2), Thābit ibn Qays b. Shimās had a very loud voice. He said: "I am the one who used to raise my voice above God's Messenger. My works failed, and I am amongst the people of the hellfire." Then he sat in his house, distressed.

God's Messenger noticed his absence, so some people went to him and said: "God's Messenger has been asking about you, what is the matter?"

He said: "I am the one who raises his voice above the voice of the Prophet and speaks loudly to him. My works have failed, and I am going to hell!"

They went back to the Prophet and informed him of this, to which he replied: "No, rather he is a person of Paradise!" And he was slain at the Battle of Yamāmah.

Author's comments: By "And he was slain at the Battle of Yamāmah," the narrator means that he was martyred there and intends to confirm the prediction of the Prophet. And this narration is transmitted by various routes with minor differences in wording.

(3) In the same source, Bukhārī in *Adab*, Ibn Abī Dunyā, and Bayhaqī narrate from Dāwud ibn Qays:

I saw the apartments (*ḥujurāt*) were made from palm branches—covered from the outside with cloths of hair. I think the width of their doors, from the door of the apartment to the door of the house, was about six or seven cubits. The courtyard of the inner house was ten cubits, and I think its roof was between seven and eight.

Author's comments: A similar account is given by Ibn Saʿd from ʿAtāʾ al-Khurasānī, who said: "I saw the apartments of the wives of God's Messenger were made from palm branches with cloths of black hair upon their doors…."

(4) In the same source, Aḥmad, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ṭabrānī and Ibn Mardawayh narrate with a good chain from al-Ḥārith ibn Ḍarār al-Khuzāʿī:

I went to God's Messenger and he invited me to Islam, so I entered Islam and affirmed it. He invited me to pay the alms (*zakāt*), so I affirmed it. I said: "O Messenger of God! I will return to my people and invite them to embrace Islam and pay the alms—then whoever responds to me, I will collect his alms—and you can send me a messenger at such-and-such time to bring you the alms I have collected."

So when Ḥārith collected the alms tax from those who responded to him and the time came for God's Messenger to send someone to him, the messenger was detained and did not come. Ḥārith feared that he had done something to incur God and His Messenger's displeasure, so he called the chiefs of his people and told them: "God's Messenger had set a time to send a messenger to me to collect whatever alms I had gathered, and God's Messenger does not break his word. I do not think he would delay his messenger unless he was upset, so let us go to God's Messenger."

God's Messenger had sent Walīd ibn ʿUqbah to Ḥārith to collect the alms he had assembled, but when Walīd had travelled for a while, he became afraid and returned to God's Messenger saying: "Ḥārith refused to give me the alms and wanted to kill me!"

So God's Messenger assembled a delegation to send to Ḥārith.

Ḥārith and his companions set forth until the delegation approached, having set off from Medina. When they saw Ḥārith they said: "This is Ḥārith."

He approached them and asked: "To whom have you been dispatched?"

They said: "To you."

"Why?"

"God's Messenger sent Walīd ibn ʿUqbah to you. He claims you refused to give him the alms you had collected and tried to kill him."

"No! By He who sent Muḥammad with Truth! I neither saw him nor did he come to me!"

When Ḥārith entered in the presence of God's Messenger, the latter asked: "Did you refuse to give my messenger the alms you

had collected and threaten to kill him?"

"No! By He who sent you with Truth! I neither saw him nor did he see me. I only came because I thought that God's Messenger had held back from me. I was afraid that God and His Messenger were displeased with me!"

Then the verse came down: *O you who have faith! If a profligate should bring you some news, verify! Lest you should visit [harm] on some people out of ignorance, and then become regretful for what you have done* (49:6).

Author's comments: There are many accounts from both Sunni and Shiʿi sources that this verse was revealed about Walīd ibn ʿUqbah. Ibn ʿAbd al-Birr says in *al-Istīʿāb*: "There is no disagreement amongst the people of knowledge about the interpretation of the Qur'an on this matter, namely that God said *If a profligate should bring you some news*… about Walīd ibn ʿUqbah."

(5) In *Maḥāsin*, it is narrated from Ziyād al-Ḥadhdhāʾ that Abū Jaʿfar [Imām al-Bāqir] told him:

O Ziyād! Woe to you, is the religion anything but love? Do you not see that God says: *Say, "If you love God, then follow me; God will love you and forgive you your sins, and God is all-forgiving, all-merciful"* (3:31)? Do you not regard that God told Muḥammad: *But God has endeared faith to you and made it appealing in your hearts* (49:7)? And that He says: *…who love those who migrate toward them* (59:9)? Love is the religion, and the religion is love.

Author's comments: It is narrated in *al-Kāfī* from Fuḍayl ibn Yasār that Imām al-Ṣādiq said something similar: "Is faith anything other than love and hate?" Then he recited the verse *But God has endeared faith to you*… (49:7).

(6) In *Majmaʿ*, it is said:

Transgression (*fusūq*—in 49:7) means lying—from Ibn ʿAbbās, and Ibn Zayd from Abū Jaʿfar [Imām al-Bāqir].

Author's comments: Some other narrations say the same.

(7) In *al-Kāfī*, it is narrated from ʿAlī ibn ʿUqbah that Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq] said:

The believer is the brother of the believer, his eye and his guide. He does not betray him, wrong him, defraud him nor promise something to him only to break it.

Author's comments: Other narrations have been transmitted with

this meaning. In some, he is narrated to say:

The Muslim is the brother of the Muslim; he neither wrongs him, forsakes him, nor backbites about him.

(8) In *Maḥāsin*, it is narrated from Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī that Abū Jaʿfar [Imām al-Bāqir] said:

The believer is the brother of the believer because of his father and his mother—and that is because God created the believer from the clay of the gardens of the heavens (*janān al-samāwāt*), and cast into them the wind of His spirit (*rūḥ*). That is how he is his brother because of his father and his mother.

(9) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Aḥmad, Bukhārī, Muslim, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Mundhir, Ibn Mardawayh and Bayhaqī in his *Sunan* relate from Anas:

It was said to the Prophet, "Would that you see ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubay."

So the Prophet went to him, riding a donkey, and the Muslims accompanied him, walking on salty barren land. When the Prophet reached ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubay, the latter said, "Keep away from me! By God, the bad smell of your donkey has harmed me."

On that, a man from the Helpers said: "By God! The smell of the donkey of God's Messenger is better than your smell."

Upon that, a man from ʿAbd Allāh's tribe got angry for Abd Allāh's sake, and the two men abused each other, which caused the friends of the two men to get angry, and the two groups started fighting with sticks, shoes and hands. We were informed that the following Divine Verse was revealed in this regard: *And if two groups of the faithful fight each other, make peace between them* (49:9).

Author's comments: In some narrations, as we see in *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, the one who said this to ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy was ʿAbd Allāh b. Rawāḥah and it was his group from the Aws and Ibn Ubay's group from the Khazraj who came to blows. However, it is not entirely clear how the contents of the verse and its ruling apply to these accounts.

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Verses 11–18

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَسْخَرْ قَوْمٌ مِنْ قَوْمٍ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِنْهُمْ وَلَا نِسَاءٌ مِنْ نِسَاءٍ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُنَّ خَيْرًا مِنْهُنَّ ۖ وَلَا تَلْمِزُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَابَزُوا بِالْأَلْقَابِ ۖ بِئْسَ الِاسْمُ الْفُسُوقُ بَعْدَ الْإِيمَانِ ۚ وَمَنْ لَمْ يَتُبْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ ﴿١١﴾

(49:11) ***O you who have faith! Let not any people ridicule another people: it may be that they are better than they are; nor let women [ridicule] women: it may be that they are better than they are. And do not defame yourselves, nor insult one another by [calling] nicknames. How evil are profane names subsequent to faith! And whoever is not penitent—such are the wrongdoers.***

"Ridicule" (*sakhriyyah*) means to deride someone by mention of things that belittle or demean them, whether through word, gesture or deeds, imitating them in a way that causes others to laugh. A "people" (*qawm*) means a group of persons, and this word was originally used exclusively for men because they undertook (*qiyām*) important matters while women did not. And the word *qawm* appears in the verse in this sense because it is juxtaposed with "women" (*nisāʾ*). …*it may be that they are better than they are* is the wisdom behind these prohibitions.

From the tone of the verse, we understand that the reason for the prohibition is that the person being ridiculed might be superior in God's eyes than the person doing the ridiculing, whether they are men or women. The prohibition specifically prohibits women from ridiculing women and people from ridiculing people is because this is the usual form of mockery.

And do not defame yourselves…: It has been said that "to defame" (*lumz*) means to call attention to faults; *yourselves* (anfusakum) is made the object of defamation to show that they are a single community who belong to one another. This shows that when one of them defames another he is really defaming himself, so he should avoid defaming anyone else in the same way as he would detest for anyone else to defame him. Hence, when

God says *yourselves*, this alludes to the wisdom behind this prohibition.

…nor call one another nicknames. How evil are profane names subsequent to faith! To call (*nabz*) means to give someone a nickname. However, it appears to be restricted in its meaning to offensive nicknames. So "calling one another nicknames" means calling one another detestable names like "sinner" (*fāsiq*) or "fool" (*safīh*), etc.

And "name" (*ism*) in *How evil are profane names…* is used for "mention" (*dhikr*). For example, one might say: "So-and-so's name for liberality has become widespread!" Therefore, this phrase means: "The worst sort of mention is to mention people—after they have believed—in association with profanity." For it is fitting that a believer, insofar as he is a believer, to be mentioned in association with good things, not defamed with things that make him appear unpleasant. For example, calling someone an epithet that begins "Son of a…!".

It is also possible that "name" (*ism*) here is used to mean "mark" (*simah* or *ʿalāmah*), in which case this phrase means: "The worst mark is that a person should be marked with profanity after believing, by being associated with evil qualities." It would be said to someone who committed a sin then repented: "O sinner of such-and-such." Alternatively, it could also mean: "The worst name for a person to make a name for himself with profanity by using offensive names for others." In this latter case, this sentence also alludes to the wisdom behind the prohibition.

And whoever is not penitent—such are the wrongdoers: This means that whoever does not repent for these sins that he commits after God has prohibited them, does not regret them and does not return to God by avoiding them—these people are truly wrongdoers because they see no problem with their deeds, even though God has counted them as sins and forbidden them.

In short *And whoever is not penitent…* suggests that there were some believers who were committing these sins.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ ۖ وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا وَلَا يَغْتَبْ بَعْضُكُمْ بَعْضًا ۚ أَيُحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَنْ يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿١٢﴾

(49:12) ***O you who have faith! Avoid much suspicion. Indeed some suspicions are sins. And do not spy on or backbite one another.***

Would any of you love to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would hate it. And be wary of God; indeed God is all-clement, all-merciful.

The kind of *suspicion* (ẓann) that God commands the faithful to avoid is harbouring ill thoughts of others (*ẓann al-sūʾ*). After all, thinking well of people (*ẓann al-khayr*) is a recommended act, as we can glean from the verse: *When you [first] heard about it, why did not the faithful, men and women, think well of their folks…* (24:12).

Avoiding suspicion means to avoid letting it have an effect. For example, if you have an ill-suspicion towards your believing brother and you accuse him of it, or mention it to someone else, or otherwise allow it to have an effect. As for suspicion itself, insofar as it is a thought in your mind, this is something that occurs spontaneously and without you willing it. This means that the prohibition does not apply to such thoughts, unless of course you are somehow actively entertaining them.

Therefore, some forms of suspicion are sinful insofar as they have an effect on your behavior; you might belittle or slander the person who is the target of your suspicions, or there might be some other forbidden thing resulting from these. The phrase "much suspicion" (*kathīr min al-ẓann*) is left indefinite (*nakirah*) to stress that it is abundant in its own right rather than in comparison to any other kind of suspicion. This refers to the kind of suspicion which is sinful—so it is abundant in of itself, but only one kind of suspicion or thought. If on the other hand God meant "much suspicion" in general, as if to say that you should avoid much suspicion, whether you know it to be sinful or not, as a matter of precaution, lest you fall into sinfulness thereby.

And do not spy…: "Spy" (*tajassus*) means to pry into people's private affairs to try and find out about them. It is similar to "inquire" (*taḥassus*), except that "spy" carries a negative connotation while "inquire" carries a positive one. That is why some scholars have said this verse means: "Do not seek out the faults of Muslims to pry into matters that people keep private."

…or backbite one another. Would any of you love to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would hate it: According to *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, "backbiting" (*ghībah*) means to mention faults behind someone's back in such a way that wisdom does not allow. Other commentaries have defined it both narrowly and broadly, according to the different instances of it we find in jurisprudence. Ultimately, it devolves to a person mentioning

something behind someone else's back that he would not like said about him. Hence it is not considered backbiting to mention what sins an open sinner (*mutajāhir bi al-fisq*) does publicly.

Backbiting eats away at the fabric of society little by little, and removes the positive effects of social interaction, namely that each person may mingle with his companions safe in the knowledge that he is held in good estimation by them and not disliked or thought base. On the other hand, when he is known by qualities that are disliked or considered shameful, his companions will withdraw from him. It is to the extent of this withdrawal that the social bond is weakened; this is why backbiting is likened to eating a corpse, as backbiting eats away at the society limb by limb until the life itself has gone.

A person will only choose to live in a society in which he has a good social identity or standing, so that others will mingle with him and he will benefit from others and be beneficial to them. Backbiting about him and mentioning his faults to others deprives him of this identity and undermines this standing. This diminishes a good society, and if this process continues by the spread of backbiting, it will reach a point where the goodness of society will be replaced by corruption. At this point, there will be no more mutual safety, familiarity or trust. The medicine will become poison.

So in reality, backbiting represents the destruction of a person's social identity without his being aware of it or being otherwise able to sense it. If he were aware of this and the dangers it posed, he would take precautions to protect himself from this invasion of his privacy, which is a veil that God has placed over a person's faults and defects in order that human beings might—as their nature demands—gather in communities and cooperate with one another. And which person is completely without faults?

It is to this reality that God calls attention with the following image: *Would any of you love to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would hate it.* This is a rhetorical question intended as a negation. God asks if "any of you" (*aḥadukum*) would love this act rather than "some of you" (*baʿḍukum*) to make the prohibition as broad as possible. This is why He emphasises it with the words *you* [pl.] *would hate it*, meaning that all of you would hate it, rather than just one of you.

In short, this part of the verse compares backbiting about a believer to eating the flesh of his dead brother. The flesh is that of his brother

because backbiting about another Muslim means backbiting about another member of the Islamic community that is made up of the faithful, and the faithful are indeed brothers. The brother is described as dead because the object of this backbiting is unaware of what is being said about him behind his back.

Moreover, *you would hate it* is phrased in the past tense—*fa karahtumūhu*—rather than in the present—*fa takrahūnahu*—to show that this aversion is something that is true in all situations. You would always hate to eat their dead brother, so just you hate that, you must hate to backbite your believing brother because this is in the same spirit as one of you eating his dead brother.

And note that when God says *Would any of you love to eat…?*, this rationale for the prohibition on backbiting applies to spying as well. The other difference between the two is that backbiting means making known the faults of one person to another, or finding out about the faults of one person without him knowing by means of another, whereas spying means finding out about the faults of another person directly. Therefore it is not unlikely that this rationale applies to both sins.

Also note that this statement suggests that it is only forbidden to backbite about Muslims. The contextual indication of this is found in the rationale *the flesh of his dead brother* as brotherhood only exists amongst the Muslims.

And be wary of God; indeed God is all-clement, all-merciful appears to be semantically connected to *Avoid much suspicion…* if the meaning of wariness (*taqwā*) is to avoid these sins which you had been committing by repenting to God. He says *indeed God is all-clement, all-merciful* to remind people that God accepts repentance abundantly and is excessively merciful to those of His servants who turn to him penitently.

And if it means to avoid them and stay away from them even if you were not already committing them, then when God says *indeed God is all-clement, all-merciful* this means that God turns abundantly to His servants who are wary (*muttaqīn*) and grants them guidance, success and protection from the snares of misery, and is excessively merciful to them.

This is because clemency (*tawbah*) from God can have two meanings; clemency before His servant repents (*tawbah*), meaning that He turns to them and grants them success (*tawfīq*) in the form of their repentance, as God says: *then He turned clemently toward them so that they might be penitent* (9:118); or clemency after their repentance, in which case He turns

to them with forgiveness (*maghfirah*) and accepts their repentance, as He says elsewhere: *But whoever repents after his wrongdoing, and reforms, then God shall accept his repentance* (39:5).

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۚ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١٣﴾

(49:13) ***O mankind! Indeed We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may identify yourselves with one another. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of God is the most Godwary among you. Indeed God is all-knowing, all-aware.***

Shuʿūb ("nations") is the plural of *shiʿb* and, according to *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, refers to a great community of people, such as the Arab tribal confederations of the Rabīʿah and Muḍar. *Qabāʾil* ("tribes") is the plural of *qabīlah*, which is a lesser unit than a nation, such as the Tamīm tribe in relation to the Muḍar nation.

It is said that *shuʿūb* are lesser units than *qabāʾil*, and they are called as such because they branch (*tashaʿʿub*) off from them. Rāghib says:

A *shaʿb* ("nation") is a tribe than branches off from a single community, whose plural is *shuʿūb*—as in the present verse—and a *shiʿb* is a valley which branches off into multiple ravines at one end, such that if you saw it from the branching side you would imagine it was a single valley branching into many, while if you saw it from the joining side you would imagine it was two valleys merging together. The verb *shaʿaba* is a contranym[1], as it can mean either to come together or to split apart.

It is said that *shuʿūb* ("nations") are for non-Arabs and *qabāʾil* ("tribes") are for Arabs, and it appears that this etymology is derived from one of the above two, and we shall discuss this fully below.

Commentators have said that the tenor of this verse is to negate boasting about one's lineage. In this reading, *a male and a female* refers to Adam and Eve. In other words: We created you from one set of parents whom you all share whether you are black or white, Arab or non-Arab. And we

1 Contranym is a word with two opposite meanings. [Ed.]

did not make you into different nations and tribes to ennoble some of you above others but rather so that you may know one another. And when you know one another you will come together, cooperate and interact. If we imagine that none of the members of the society knew one another, then the very social bond would be broken and humanity would perish. This knowing one another is the goal of making you into tribes and nations, not so that you can vie with one another in vainglorious bragging about your ancestors!

It is said: *A male and a female* means man and woman in general. The tenor of the verse is to overturn the division of society into different classes, such as white and black, Arab and non-Arab, rich and poor, slave and master, and man and woman. In other words: O people! We created you from a man and a woman. Each and every one of you is a person born to two parents, so you do not differ in this regard. And any difference that has come about through tribes and nations—and this is all according to the Divine Plan—does not signify the superiority of any of you over others, rather it exists only for the purpose of you knowing one another and forming societies.

However, we could object that the tenor of the verse is to negate boasting about one's lineage and condemning this practice, as God says: *and made you nations and tribes that you may identify yourselves one another*. It is not clear how this goal is achieved in the second interpretation, although one could argue that the distinction in lineage is just one form of the class-distinctions that exist in society and the verse is intended to overturn all forms of class-distinction, not just those based on lineage. So just as it is possible to reject superiority based on lineage and condemn it based on the fact that all these lineages ultimately return to the same people—Adam and Eve—whom everyone shares as parents, it is equally possible to reject and condemn it based on the fact that every person is born from two parents and all people are equal in this regard.

The truth is that if *and made you nations and tribes that you may identify yourselves* is meant to condemn the notion of superiority based on lineage, then the first interpretation is more apposite. Otherwise the second interpretation is better because it is more universal in scope.

Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of God is the most Godwary among you: This is obviously a new sentence, as it mentions nobility in the sight of God.

At the beginning of the verse, God spoke about how people, insofar

as they are people, are equal with one another without any distinction and no one person is superior to any other. Any distinctions that appear to be conferred by nations and tribes only exist to facilitate people identifying with one another and forming a community together. Without this, people cannot intermingle, cooperate and assist one another. This is why differences were created between people, not so that they can vie with one another in vainglory or declare themselves superior because of the color of their skin, with one group enslaving another on that basis—one human making another a servant, one people claiming supremacy over another—as this can only lead to the spread of corruption on land and sea, the destruction of crop and stock, and the inversion of society's original purpose.

At the end of the verse, God now calls attention to something different with the sentence *Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of God is the most Godwary among you.* Here, He is speaking about nobility in His sight—the only real nobility anything has.

He does this because it is in the nature of the human being to seek out nobility and dignity to distinguish himself from others and mark him out amongst his peers. Most people, because they are connected to worldly life, think that nobility and dignity can be found in the features of material existence—wealth, beauty, lineage, rank etc. So they give everything in the pursuit of these things and use any means necessary to acquire them, in order that they may vie with others thereby and gain ascendancy over them.

And yet, these features of material existence are illusory. They contain no nobility, no dignity; they merely cast their possessors into perdition. True dignity is that which leads the human being to true happiness, which is the good life that never ends in the vicinity to the Almighty Lord. This nobility and dignity is none other than Godwariness (*taqwā*)—the only means anyone has to attain felicity in the abode of the Hereafter. Happiness in this world is secondary to this. God says: *You desire the transitory gains of this world, while God desires the Hereafter* (8:27) and *And take provision, for indeed the best provision is Godwariness* (2:197). And if nobility is Godwariness, then the most noble of people in God's sight are the most Godwary of them, as He says in this verse.

This is the goal and the prize that God in His infinite knowledge has chosen for mankind. But there is no competition or antagonism between the people who seek this goal—they can all attain it. This is unlike every

other goal or honour which people pursue based on their false notions, whether wealth, leadership, fame, lineage or anything else.

Indeed God is all-knowing, all-aware: This emphasizes the contents of this verse and suggests that that which God has chosen as nobility for mankind is true nobility, and He has selected this based on His infinite knowledge and awareness. This is unlike what men choose as honour or dignity for themselves, which are no more than fleeting illusions—the vanities of the life of this world. As God says: *The life of this world is nothing but diversion and play, but the abode of the Hereafter is indeed Life, had they known!* (29:64)

Moreover, this verse indicates that people should follow the ordinances of their Lord in terms of their life goals and choose what He has chosen for them and guided them towards; and He has chosen Godwariness for them. In the same vein, they must choose for themselves the way of life which He has chosen for them, which is the Religion of Islam.

قَالَتِ الْأَعْرَابُ آمَنَّا ۖ قُلْ لَمْ تُؤْمِنُوا وَلَٰكِنْ قُولُوا أَسْلَمْنَا وَلَمَّا يَدْخُلِ
الْإِيمَانُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ ۖ وَإِنْ تُطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ لَا يَلِتْكُمْ مِنْ
أَعْمَالِكُمْ شَيْئًا ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿١٤﴾

(49:14) ***The Bedouins say, "We have faith." Say, "You do not have faith; rather say, 'We have embraced Islam,' for faith has not yet entered your hearts. Yet if you obey God and His Messenger, He will not stint anything of your works. Indeed God is all-forgiving, all-merciful."***

This verse and those that follow of it until the end of the sūrah are concerned with the state of the Bedouins who claim to have faith (*īmān*) and count their faith as a favor they have done to the Prophet. The tenor with which God relates their words and His command to the Prophet to respond: *You do not have faith yet…* indicates that this refers to only some of the Bedouins rather than all of them, as God has said elsewhere: *Yet among the Bedouins are those who believe in God and the Last Day* (9:99).

The Bedouins say, "We have faith." Say, "You do not have faith…."—This means: "They tell you: 'We have faith.' And claim to be faithful. Tell them: 'You do not have faith' and deny their claim. Then follow on from that by telling them to say: *'We have embraced Islam…'*"

The phrase …*for faith has not yet entered your hearts* says that faith has not entered their hearts, but this also signals an anticipation that it will. Hence this is not merely a restatement of *You do not have faith*.

In this verse God has negated faith from them and clarified this by saying that it has not yet entered their hearts while affirming that they have embraced Islam. The difference between faith and Islam appears to be that faith is something that abides in the heart in the form of conviction (*iʿtiqād*) while Islam is something that abides upon the tongue and in the limbs; Islam is submission with one's tongue and body by verbally testifying to Divine Unity (*tawḥīd*) and prophethood (*nubuwwah*) and acting outwardly in accordance with this profession, regardless of whether one has conviction in what he has professed or not. It is by mere profession of the two testimonies of faith (*shahādatayn*) that life is sanctified and marriage and inheritance are conducted.

Yet if you obey God and His Messenger, He will not stint anything of your works—līt ("stint") means to diminish; *obey* means to do so sincerely with your thoughts matching your actions without hypocrisy (*nifāq*). Obeying God means responding to the beliefs and practices He summons you toward. Obeying His Messenger means believing him and following his commands in those affairs of the *Ummah* he has authority over. *Works* (aʿmāl) here means the recompense (*jazāʾ*) thereof; therefore, to stint someone of their works means to diminish their reward for them.

In other words: But if you obey God's command to follow His religion with conviction and obey the commands of His messenger, then He will not reduce anything from the reward of your actions. *Indeed God is all-forgiving, all-merciful* explains why God will not reduce the reward of your deeds if you obey Him and His Messenger.

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَرْتَابُوا وَجَاهَدُوا بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الصَّادِقُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

(49:15) ***The faithful are only those who have attained faith in God and His Messenger and then have never doubted, and who wage jihad with their possessions and their persons in the way of God. It is they who are the truthful.***

This verse provides a detailed description of the faithful (*muʾminūn*), which follows from the general description given above, namely that they

are those whom faith has entered their hearts, which is entailed by the phrases *You do not have faith* and *for faith has not yet entered your hearts*.

The faithful are only those who have attained faith in God and His Messenger…: This restricts the category of the faithful to those who have faith in God and His Messenger and so on. In other words, this marks out the description of the faithful in this verse as a complete definition of them—namely a definition that perfectly includes all the members of a category and excludes everything else (*jāmiᶜ māniᶜ*)—so whoever has these qualities is truly faithful and anyone who lacks any of these qualities is not truly faithful.

Attaining faith in God and His Messenger means having conviction in one's heart (*ᶜaqd al-qalb*) about God's unity (*tawḥīd*), the truth of what His Messenger has brought and the veracity of His messengership, and following the commands of the Messenger.

…and then have never doubted… meaning they have not doubted the truth of what they have faith in; their faith is firmly rooted and not shaken by any doubt. It has been said that using the conjunction *and then* (*thumma*) rather than *and* (*wa*) signifies that the absence of any doubt is a continuous state. It is as if their faith is always fresh—as firm and unshakable as when they first found it. Had God said: "And then not doubted" (*wa lam yartābū*), it would have included those who initially have faith without any doubt, without saying anything about their state afterwards.

…and who wage jihad with their possessions and their persons in the way of God…: "To wage *jihad*" (mujāhadah) means to expend effort and exertion; *the way of God* (sabīl allāh) means His religion. To wage *jihad* with your wealth and person means to do whatever you can and do your utmost in your monetary duties, such as paying *zakāt* and other obligatory payments, and your bodily duties, such as prayer, fasting and pilgrimage.

In short, this means: "Who strive to perform their monetary and bodily duties while they and their actions are in the way of God and for the sake of His religion."

It is they who are the truthful: Namely they are the ones who are truthful in their claim to have faith if they have the aforementioned qualities.

قُلْ أَتُعَلِّمُونَ اللَّهَ بِدِينِكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ ۚ
وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١٦﴾

(49:16) ***Say, "Will you inform God about your faith while God***

knows whatever there is in the heavens and whatever there is in the earth, and God has knowledge of all things?"

This is a rebuke to the Bedouins who said: "We have faith" and then insisted that they do have faith and are being truthful in their claim. It is said that when the previous verse came down, the Bedouins swore that they were truly faithful, so God sent the verse "Say, '*Will you inform God about your faith*…?'" And the meaning of this verse is clear.

يَمُنُّونَ عَلَيْكَ أَنْ أَسْلَمُوا ۖ قُلْ لَا تَمُنُّوا عَلَيَّ إِسْلَامَكُمْ ۖ بَلِ اللَّهُ يَمُنُّ عَلَيْكُمْ أَنْ هَدَاكُمْ لِلْإِيمَانِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿١٧﴾

(49:17) ***They count it as a favor to you that they have embraced Islam. Say, "Do not count it as a favor to me your embracing of Islam. Rather it is God who has done you a favor in that He has guided you to faith, should you be truthful."***

In other words they act as though their embrace of Islam is something you should be grateful for. However, in counting this as a favor they have erred from two aspects: Firstly, the real favor is to have faith (*īmān*), which is the key to human happiness in this world and the Hereafter, rather than embracing Islam which has formal benefits such as rendering one's life inviolable and allowing them to marry and inherit. Secondly, the religion has nothing to do with the Prophet; he is just a messenger who has been charged with delivering a message to mankind, so embracing Islam is no favor to him.

If they wanted to count themselves as doing a favor to anyone, they should count themselves as doing a favor to God, because it is His religion after all. But even then, no one can count embracing Islam as a favor to God because the ones who benefit from the religion in this World and the Hereafter are the faithful, not God, who is utterly needless. In fact, it is God who has done them the favor by guiding them to the true religion.

Also notice that God says that He has done them a favor by guiding them to *faith* (īmān) rather than Islam. This is because it is faith which is the true favor, while Islam only benefits them outwardly.

Say, "Do not count it as a favor to me your embracing of Islam. Rather it is God who has done you a favor…"—This highlights their error from both angles; first, that they think they have done the Prophet a favor when he is just a messenger and has nothing to do with the matter (*Do not count*

it as a favor to me your embracing of Islam) and secondly, that it is faith rather than Islam that should be counted as a favor (if there is a favor at all), as we said above.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ غَيْبَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ وَاللَّهُ بَصِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

(49:18) ***Indeed God knows the Unseen of the heavens and the earth, and God sees best what you do.***

This represents the conclusion of the sūrah. It affirms and provides the ultimate rationale for all of the commands and prohibitions it contains, the realities it describes and its reports about the faith of one group of people and the lack of faith of another. This verse provides a rationale for all of that.

The Unseen of the heavens and the earth means the unseen things they contain or possibly even those that are beyond them as well.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr* it is narrated from Ibn Abī Ḥātim, from Maqātil about the verse *O you who have faith! Let not any people ridicule another people* (49:11):
This was revealed about a group of the Banū Tamīm who mocked Bilāl, Salmān, ʿAmmār, Khabbāb, Ṣuhayb, Ibn Fahīrah, and Sālim the servant of Abū Hudhayfah.

(2) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, we read:
Let not any people ridicule another people was revealed about Thābit b. Qays b. Shammās who had a blockage in his ear. When he entered the mosque people would make way for him so he could sit close to the Prophet and hear what he was saying. One day he entered the mosque when people had just finished the prayer and taken their places. He began stepping over people and saying: "Make way, make way," until he reached a man who [did not move but] said to him: "You found somewhere to sit, so sit!" So he sat behind this man, irritated.
When the gloom brightened, he asked: "Who is this?"
The man told him: "I am so-and-so."
So Thābit said to him: "Son of such-and-such a woman." He called him by his mother's name, which was a form of insult during the Age of Ignorance. Then the verse was revealed.

(3) In the same source, it is related from Ibn ʿAbbās:
The phrase *nor let women [ridicule] women* was revealed about the wives of the Prophet who mocked Umm Salamah.

(4) It is related from Anas:
She had girded her loins with a *subaybah*, which was a white robe, and allowed its two sides to hang down behind her, so that she was pulling them. ʿĀʾishah said to Ḥafṣah: "Look at that dragging behind her like a dog's tongue!" And this was their joke.
It is also said that they would mock her for being short and make gestures indicating her shortness. This is from al-Ḥasan.

(5) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is narrated from Abu Jubayrah b. al-Ḍaḥḥāk:[1]
About us concerning the Banū Salamah came the verse: *nor call one another nicknames*. God's Messenger came to Medina and there was no man amongst us save that he had two or three names. So when one person called another with one of those names, they would say: "O God's Messenger, he does not like this name." It was then that God sent down the words *nor call one another nicknames*.

(6) In the same source it is narrated from Ibn Abī Ḥātim from al-Sudday:
Salmān al-Fārisī was travelling with two men on a journey, serving them and partaking of their food. Salmān slept for a while and his companions could not find him, so they pitched the tents themselves and said: "All Salmān wants is to come and find the food ready and the tents prepared!"
So when Salmān came, they sent him to God's Messenger to ask for food, so he went to him and said: "O Messenger of God! My companions have sent me to bring them some food, if you have any."
He asked: "What will your companions do with food when they have already eaten?"

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1 It is narrated from Aḥmad, ʿAbd b. Hamīd, Bukhārī in *Adab*, Abū Dāwūd, Tirmidhī, Nasāʾī, Ibn Mājah, Abū Yaʿlā, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Mundhir, Baghawī in his *Muʿjam*, Ibn Ḥabbān, Shīrāzī in *Alqāb*, Ṭabarānī, Ibn al-Sunnī in *ʿAmal al-Yawm wa al-Layla*, and Ḥākim (who declared it authentic), Ibn Mardawayh, and Bayhaqī in *Shuʿub al-Īmān*.

Salmān went back and informed them of what had happened, so they came to God's Messenger and said: "By He who sent you with truth, we have not found food since we made camp."
He said: "The two of you ate Salmān with your words." Then the verse came down: *Would any of you love to eat the flesh of his dead brother?* (49:12)

(7) In the same source, al-Ḍiyāʾ al-Maqdasī narrates from Anas:
The Arabs used to serve one another on their travels, and with Abū Bakr and ʿUmar was a man who served them. Once they slept and awoke to find that he had not prepared any food for them. They said: "This one is a slugabed!" So they woke him up saying: "Go to God's Messenger and tell him that Abū Bakr and ʿUmar send their greetings and ask you for food."
He told him: "They have eaten already."
So they went to him and said: "O Messenger of God! What have we eaten?"
He said: "The flesh of your brother. By He in whose hand is my soul, I see morsels of it between your teeth."
They said: "Ask forgiveness for us, God's Messenger!"
He said: "Rather tell him to ask forgiveness for you both."

Author's comments: It appears that the story in these two accounts is one and the same story; the two men mentioned in the first story are Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, and the man mentioned in the second story is Salmān.

(8) This is supported by what is narrated in *Jawāmiʿ al-Jāmīʿ*, where we read:
Abū Bakr and ʿUmar sent Salmān to God's Messenger to bring them some food. So he sent him to Usāmah b. Zayd, who looked after God's Messenger's possessions while he was travelling. He told Salmān: "I don't have anything."
So he went back to the two of them and they said: "Usāmah is being stingy. If we sent Salmān to an overflowing well, its water would dry up!" Then they went to God's Messenger and he told them: "Why is it I see morsels of putrid flesh in your mouths?"
They said: "O Messenger of God! We haven't eaten any meat today!"
He said: "You have done wrong by eating the flesh of Salmān and Usāmah." Then the verse was revealed.

(9) In *ʿUyūn*, it is narrated from Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā b. Abī ʿIbād,

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from his uncle, who said:

One day I heard al-Riḍā reciting poetry. Some of it went like this:

"We all wish to put-off the hour / but fate is ever the bane of hope

Let not ambition's vanities deceive you / stay the course and speak no pleas

This world is but a fleeting shadow / the rider alights beneath on his way."

I asked him: "God give you strength, whose are these?"

He said: "An Iraqi of yours."

I said: "The dimwit recited them to me for himself."

He said: "Say his name; don't use language like that. God says: … *nor call one another nicknames* (49:11). Perhaps he wouldn't like you calling him that!"

(10) And in *al-Kāfī*, it is narrated from Ḥusayn b. Mukhtār from Abū ʿAbd Allāh:

The Commander of the Faithful said: "Put your brother's affairs in the best light until he does something to turn you away from him. Do not think something bad of what he has said while you can yet find a good meaning for it."

(11) And in *Nahj al-Balāghah* he says:

When righteousness prevails over a time and its people, and one man thinks badly of another without cause, he has sinned. But when corruption prevails over a time and its people then one man thinks good of another, he is deluded.

Author's comments: These two narrations are not contradictory. The second one concerns the thought (*ẓann*) itself, while the first one looks at that thought having an effect on a person's behavior.

(12) In *al-Khiṣāl*, it is narrated from Asbāṭ b. Muḥammad who narrates via a chain going back to the Prophet:

The Prophet said: "Backbiting is worse than fornication."

Someone said: "O Messenger of God! Why is that?"

He said: "The fornicator can repent and God forgives him. While the backbiter can repent, but God will not forgive him until his target excuses him."

(13) And in *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is narrated from Ibn Mardawayh, from Abū Saʿīd and Jābir:

The Prophet said: "Backbiting is worse than fornication."

They asked: "O Messenger of God! How is backbiting worse than

fornication?"

He said: "A man might fornicate, but he can repent and God will forgive him, while the backbiter will not be forgiven until his target forgives him."

(14) In *al-Kāfī*, it is narrated from al-Sukūnī from Abū ʿAbd Allāh that God's Messenger said:

Backbiting spoils a man's religion faster than a morsel reaches his stomach.

(15) In the same source it is narrated from Ḥafṣ b. ʿUmar from Abū ʿAbd Allāh:

Someone asked the Prophet: "What is the expiation (*kaffārah*) for backbiting?"

He said: "To pray for the forgiveness of the one he spoke against just as he mentioned him."

(16) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, about the verse …*and made you nations and tribes*… (48:13), we read:

"Nations" are the non-Arabs, and "tribes" are the Arabs.

Author's comments: *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* attributes this to Imām al-Ṣādiq.

(17) 19. In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is narrated from Ibn Mardawayh and Bayhaqī from Jābir b. ʿAbd Allāh:

During the days of *tashrīq*, God's Messenger addressed us with his Farewell Speech. He said: "O people! Lo! Indeed your Lord is One. Lo! Indeed your parents are one. Lo! An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab over an Arab, nor black over red, nor red over black, except by Godwariness! Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of God is the most Godwary among you. Lo! Have I not conveyed my message?"

They said: "Yes, O Messenger of God!"

He said: "Then let those who are present convey it to those who are absent."

(18) And in *al-Kāfī*, it is narrated from Abū Bakr al-Ḥaḍramī from Abū ʿAbd Allāh:

God's Messenger married Miqdād b. al-Aswad to Ḍabāʿah, the daughter of Zubayr b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib. He did this to set a precedent so that others would follow his example and know that the noblest of them in the sight of God was the most Godwary amongst them.

(19) In the *Rawḍa* of *al-Kāfī*, it is narrated from Yūnus b. Yaʿqūb from

Abū ʿAbd Allāh:

Islam is prior to faith (*īmān*). It is on the basis of Islam that you inherit from one another and on its basis that you marry one another. However, it is on the basis of faith that you are rewarded by God.

(20) In *al-Khiṣāl*, it is narrated from al-Aʿmash from Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad:

Islam is not the same as faith (*īmān*). Whoever is a faithful person (*muʾmin*) is a Muslim, but not every Muslim is one of the faithful.

(21) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, about the verse *The Bedouins say, "We have faith"*:

It is narrated from Ibn Jarīr, from Qatādah: "It was revealed about the Banū Asad tribe."

Author's comments: And this is also narrated from Mujāhid and other authorities.

(22) In the same source it is narrated from Ibn Mājah, Ibn Mardawayh, Ṭabarānī, Bayhaqī in *Shuʿub al-Īmān*, from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, from God's Messenger:

Faith (*īmān*) is knowing with one's heart, affirmation with one's tongue and acting upon the pillars [of faith].

(23) In the same source it is narrated from Nasāʾī, Ibn Bazzāaz and Ibn Mardawayh from Ibn ʿAbbās:

The Banū Asad came to God's Messenger and said: "O Messenger of God, we have embraced Islam while the Arabs fought you, but we did not fight you." Then the verse was revealed: *They count it as a favor to you that they have embraced Islam* (49:17).

Author's comments: There are other narrations with the same meaning.

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Chapter 50

Sūrah Qaf

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Verses 1–14

بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

This sūrah mentions the prophetic mission (*daʿwah*) and discusses the warning it contains of the Resurrection (*maʿād*), the obstinate rejection of it by the polytheists and their bafflement at such a concept. This is because they believed that death represented a total end to the human being's identity; once a person's body turned to dust, nothing was left of them. How, they asked, could a person come back to life just as he had been before his death? It responds to their bafflement and scepticism by saying that God's knowledge encompasses them entirely and that with Him is a Preserving Book from which no detail about His creation, no matter how infinitesimally small, is omitted. Then he threatens them with the same fate as befell previous nations who perished.

Secondly, this sūrah calls attention to God's knowledge and power by mentioning His governance, as demonstrated by the creation of the heavens and the stars and celestial bodies that adorn them, and by the creation of the Earth, its expansiveness, the casting of mountains into it and the growth of various species of plants upon it, then the sending down of rain by which He provides sustenance for His servants and revives the land.

Next, it exposits the condition of the human being from the very beginning of his creation and says that every word and every thought of his is under complete and total observation so long as he is alive. Then, when death comes to him, and he is brought back for judgement, and when his accounting is finished, if he was one of the deniers then he will enter hellfire, and if he was one of the Godwary, he will enter the gardens of Paradise.

In short, the focus of this sūrah's discourse is the Resurrection and some of its most profound verses read: *You were certainly oblivious of*

this. We have removed your veil from you, and so your sight is acute today (50:22); *The day when We shall say to hell, "Are you full?" It will say, "Is there any more?"* (50:30); and *There they will have whatever they wish, and with Us there is yet more* (50:35).

This sūrah is Meccan, as demonstrated by the context of its verses. However, it has been suggested that one or two verses, beginning with *Certainly We created the heavens and the earth, and whatever is between them, in six days, and any fatigue did not touch Us* (50:38) could be from Medina, though there is no textual indication of this.

The verses we have mentioned begin with a general discussion of the Resurrection and the polytheists' scepticism thereof, and a general answer and warning to them. Then, there is a detailed response and warning second.

قٓ وَالْقُرْآنِ الْمَجِيدِ ۝١

(50:1) *Qāf. By the glorious Qur'an.*

In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, we read:

> Glory (*majd*) in everyday speech means "abundant nobility" (*sharaf wāsiʿ*). It said that a man is glorious if he is great and noble. Originally the Arabs would say: "A glorious camel" (*majadat al-ibl*) when its stomach was enormous from eating the spring pastures.

By the glorious Qur'an is an oath, the object (*jawāb*) of which is implicit but whose sense is indicated by the following sentences. Its meaning is either "By the glorious Qur'an, the Resurrection is indeed true", or "…you are indeed from the warners", or "…the warning is indeed true." It has been said that the object of the oath is actually explicitly mentioned, namely: *Rather they consider it odd…* (50:2). It has also been said that the object of this oath is: *We know what the earth diminishes from them…* (50:4). Other possibilities that have been mentioned are: *…he says no word but that there is a ready observer beside him* (50:18), *There is indeed an admonition in that…* (50:37), and *The word is unalterable with Me* (50:29). However, all of these opinions are nonsensical, and there is no evidence for them.

بَلْ عَجِبُوا أَنْ جَاءَهُمْ مُنْذِرٌ مِنْهُمْ فَقَالَ الْكَافِرُونَ هَذَا شَيْءٌ عَجِيبٌ ۝٢

(50:2) *Rather they consider it odd that a warner should have*

come to them from among themselves. So the faithless say, "This is an odd thing."

The transition with *rather* (bal) signifies a shift away from the sense of the oath's implicit object, as if to say: "Indeed We sent you as a warner but they did not believe in you, rather they considered it odd that a warner should have come to them from among themselves." Or: "Indeed the Resurrection which you warn them of is real but they do not believe in it, rather they consider it odd and are sceptical of it."

Themselves in *from among themselves* could mean they consider it odd that a warner should be a human being from their own species. This is because the idolaters denied that human beings could be prophets, as we have mentioned previously. Alternatively, *themselves* could mean they consider it odd that a warner should be an Arab like them. In other words, they find it odd that a warner should come from their own people and expound the truth to them in their own language. This is more profitable to the meaning of the verse and also a more eloquent repudiation of them.

So the faithless say, "This is an odd thing." God describes them as faithless here rather than polytheists to show that they covered the truth when it came to them. *This* refers to the idea that there will be a resurrection and they will return to God, as indicated by the following verse.

أَإِذَا مِتْنَا وَكُنَّا تُرَابًا ۖ ذَٰلِكَ رَجْعٌ بَعِيدٌ ﴿٣﴾

(50:3) ***What! When we are dead and have become dust? That is a far-off return!***

*Raj*ᶜ ("return") means the same as *rujū*ᶜ. *Far-off* (baᶜīd) means far from good sense.

The consequent phrase of their statement *What! When we are dead and have become dust?* is left implicit. Its sense is indicated by the next sentence: *That is a far-off return!* In other words: "*What! When we are dead and have become dust,* will we be brought back to life and returned?" This is a rhetorical question expressing amazement. The latter part is left implicit to suggest that they find it so odd they think it improper to mention aloud, as no sensible person would accept it. This verse is in the same vein as the verse: *They say, "When we have been lost in the dust, shall we be indeed created anew?"* (32:10).

Therefore, we can understand these verses as follows: They say in

astonishment: "What! When we are dead and have become dust—when there is nothing left of us—you mean to say we will be brought back to life?" Then it is as though someone says to them: "What is so astonishing about that?" And they reply: "That is a far-fetched return. It makes no sense!"

قَدْ عَلِمْنَا مَا تَنْقُصُ الْأَرْضُ مِنْهُمْ ۖ وَعِنْدَنَا كِتَابٌ حَفِيظٌ ۝٤

(50:4) ***We know what the earth diminishes from them, and with Us is a preserving Book.***

In this verse, God responds to their scepticism about the Resurrection. They base this on the fact that their bodies will decay to dust when they die so that no discernible part of them will remain. God answers this by saying that He knows whatever the earth consumes and takes away from their bodies. No part of them, however miniscule, escapes His knowledge, so there is no difficulty in bringing them back to life. Alternatively, this could be read as meaning "We know which of them die, are buried in the earth and gradually consumed by it. In the first instance *from* (min) signifies partition (*tabʿīḍ*), while in the second instance it signifies exposition (*tabyīn*).

And with Us is a preserving Book—meaning a book which preserves everything, along with its effects (*āthār*) and states (*aḥwāl*), or a book that records everything that happens and which is protected from change or alteration. This refers to the Guarded Tablet (*lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*) which contains everything that is and will be until the Day of Resurrection.

Some say that this refers to the Record of Deeds (*kitāb al-aʿmāl*), but this is incorrect for two reasons. First, God says that this book is preserving (*ḥafīẓ*) of *what the earth diminishes from them*, and this cannot mean their deeds. Secondly, because in the Qur'an God describes the Guarded Tablet as preserving but not the record of deeds, so there is no evidence to suggest that the "preserving book" mentioned in this verse means the record of deeds.

To summarize, they claim: When they die and decay into dust, there is no way for God to identify their parts; therefore, it is impossible for Him to bring them back to life. However, this claim is false because God has knowledge of everyone who dies and what becomes of every part of their bodies and where it ends up. And God has a preserving Book, namely the Guarded Tablet.

بَلْ كَذَّبُوا بِالْحَقِّ لَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ فَهُمْ فِي أَمْرٍ مَرِيجٍ ۝٥

(50:5) ***Rather they denied the truth when it came to them; so they are now in a perplexed state of affairs.***

Marīj (perplexed) means to be confused and muddled. The previous verse suggested that the polytheists were astonished by the idea of the Resurrection because they were not aware that God is all-knowing. In other words, they did not understand that nothing of His creation and the events that take place therein escapes His notice, and that all of that is inscribed upon the Guarded Tablet with God. So no one should find this strange.

However, this verse transitions from this suggestion and says instead that the real reason is not their ignorance, even though they are ignorant. Rather the real reason for this is their denial of the truth when it came to them; they could see plainly that it was true but they obstinately rejected it. It is not the case that they were merely ignorant and unable to comprehend the truth, but now they are in a confused state: On the one hand they see it is the truth, but on the other they deny it, while normally to know something means to believe in it.

It is said: *In a perplexed state of affairs* means that they became confused after denying the truth and do not know what to say. Sometimes they say: "He has invented a lie about God." Sometimes: "It is magic!" And others: "It is poetry!" Sometimes: "It is soothsaying!" And others: "He is mad!" That is why God follows on from this by mentioning the signs of His knowledge and power as a rebuke to them. Then God warns the idolaters by mentioning those previous nations who He punished for their denial by destroying them utterly.

أَفَلَمْ يَنْظُرُوا إِلَى السَّمَاءِ فَوْقَهُمْ كَيْفَ بَنَيْنَاهَا وَزَيَّنَّاهَا وَمَا لَهَا مِنْ فُرُوجٍ ۝٦

(50:6) ***Have they not then observed the heavens above them, how We have built them and adorned them, and that there are no clefts in them?***

Furūj ("clefts") is the plural of *farjah*, meaning a gap or crack. God describes *the heavens* as *above them* to indicate that these are visible to

them and not hidden from sight. *Adorned them* refers to the striking beauty of the stars that have been created within them. The artifice of this wondrous creation, filled as it is with beauty and utterly without flaw, is the clearest evidence of God's absolute power and boundless knowledge.

وَالْأَرْضَ مَدَدْنَاهَا وَأَلْقَيْنَا فِيهَا رَوَاسِيَ وَأَنْبَتْنَا فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ زَوْجٍ بَهِيجٍ ﴿٧﴾

(50:7) ***And We spread out the earth, and cast in it firm mountains* (rawāsī)*, and caused every delightful kind to grow in it.***

Spread out the earth means to expand it in a way that is suitable for human life. *Rawāsī* is the plural of *rāsiyah* which literally means "firm." The word "mountains" does not appear in the Arabic and is left implicit. *Bahīj* ("delightful") is from *bahjah*. In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, we read: "*Bahjah* means something pleasant which is wonderful to behold, such as flowers, blossoming trees and lush gardens." It is said: "*Bahīj* means that which delights and gladdens onlookers." And *caused every delightful kind to grow in it* means all kinds of beautiful plants.

Therefore, the creation of the earth and the astonishing signs of divine providence that pervade it are the best rational evidence for God's perfect knowledge and power.

تَبْصِرَةً وَذِكْرَىٰ لِكُلِّ عَبْدٍ مُنِيبٍ ﴿٨﴾

(50:8) ***An insight and admonition for every penitent servant.***

This sentence fulfils the role of a purposive object (*mafʿūl lahu*), meaning: "We built the heavens, spread out the earth and filled it with amazing signs of Our providence to be an insight by which every servant who wishes to return to God might see, and an admonition they might reflect upon."

وَنَزَّلْنَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً مُبَارَكًا فَأَنْبَتْنَا بِهِ جَنَّاتٍ وَحَبَّ الْحَصِيدِ ﴿٩﴾

(50:9) ***And We send down from the heavens salubrious water, with which We grow gardens and the grain which is harvested***

Samāʾ ("heavens") means "high above" and *salubrious water* (māʾ mubārak) is rain. It is described as "salubrious" (*mubārak*) because of the

abundant goodness it brings to the earth and its inhabitants.

وَالنَّخْلَ بَاسِقَاتٍ لَهَا طَلْعٌ نَضِيدٌ ﴿١٠﴾

(50:10) ***and tall date palms with regularly set spathes***

Bāsiqāt ("tall") is the plural of *bāsiqah*, meaning extremely tall. "Spathes" (*talʿ*) are the first traces of the fruit to appear, and *naḍīd* ("regularly set") means layered one on top of another.

رِزْقًا لِلْعِبَادِ ۖ وَأَحْيَيْنَا بِهِ بَلْدَةً مَيْتًا ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ الْخُرُوجُ ﴿١١﴾

(50:11) ***as a provision for servants; and with it We revive a dead country. Likewise will be the rising.***

"Provision" (*rizq*) means: that which enables a person to survive. *As a provision for servants* is a purposive object for what has been mentioned in previous verses. In other words: "We caused these gardens, grains and tall date palms with their spathes to grow so that they would be a provision for the servants." And given that this displays a truly mind-boggling level of design and intentionality, whoever created these plants to provide sustenance for the servants must have infinite knowledge and power, and therefore there is no difficulty for Him to bring the human being back to life after death, even if his body has turned to dust and scatted across the earth.

…and with it We revive a dead country is another proof for the resurrection (in addition to the one we have just mentioned) which we can derive from the text. The previous passage responded to their scepticism that God could bring them back to life after they had turned to dust and no visible trace of them remained, and the response was to demonstrate God's limitless power and knowledge. The second argument, contained in the words *and with it We revive a dead country*, seeks to establish the possibility of the Resurrection by pointing out that something similar has already happened; bringing people out of their graves alive after they have died is no different to bringing the dead plants out of the earth after they have died and they have lost their ability to grow and spread. We have already laid out this argument several times when commenting on those verses which argue for the Resurrection by pointing to the revival of the earth after its death, so interested readers can seek these passages out elsewhere in this commentary.

كَذَّبَتْ قَبْلَهُمْ قَوْمُ نُوحٍ وَأَصْحَابُ الرَّسِّ وَثَمُودُ ﴿١٢﴾ وَعَادٌ وَفِرْعَوْنُ وَإِخْوَانُ لُوطٍ ﴿١٣﴾ وَأَصْحَابُ الْأَيْكَةِ وَقَوْمُ تُبَّعٍ ۚ كُلٌّ كَذَّبَ الرُّسُلَ فَحَقَّ وَعِيدِ ﴿١٤﴾

(50:12–14) ***The people of Noah denied before them, and the inhabitants of Rass and Thamūd, and ᶜĀd, Pharaoh, and the brethren of Lot, and the inhabitants of Aykah and the people of Tubbaᶜ. Each impugned the Messengers, and so My threat became due.***

These verses are a threat and a warning to the polytheists for denying the truth when it came to them out of obstinacy, even though it was clear to them, as we mentioned above. We have already discussed the inhabitants of Rass in our commentary on Sūrah al-Furqān; the inhabitants of Aykah, who are the people of Jethro (Shuᶜayb), in our comments on Sūrah al-Ḥijr, al-Shuᶜarāʾ and Ṣād; and the people of Tubbaᶜ have been mentioned in Sūrah al-Dukhkhān.

Each impugned the Messengers, and so My threat became due implies that there is a threat of destruction which is accomplished when people deny the messengers. Elsewhere, God says: *So travel over the land and then observe how was the fate of the deniers* (16:36).

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is narrated from Ibn Abī Ḥātim, from Ibn ᶜAbbās:
Beyond this earth, God created an ocean that encompassed it. Then beyond that ocean, He created a mountain called Qāf, upon which hovers the heaven of this world. Beyond that mountain, He created an earth like this. Beyond that, God created an ocean that encompassed it. Beyond that ocean, He created a mountain called Qāf, upon which hovers the second heaven… and so on, until he had created seven earths, seven seas, seven mountains and seven heavens. That is the meaning of the verse: *…and the sea replenished with seven more seas…* (31:27).

(2) In the same source, it is narrated from Ibn Mundhir, Ibn Mardawayh, Abū al-Shaykh and al-Ḥākim from ᶜAbd Allāh b. Buraydah concerning the verse *Qāf* (50:1):
It is an emerald mountain that surrounds this world, upon which

rests the edges of the heavens.

(3) In the same source, it is narrated from Ibn Abī Dunyā in his *ʿUqūbāt* and Abū Shaykh in his *ʿUẓmah*, from Ibn ʿAbbās:
God created a mountain called Qāf that surrounds this world. Its roots reach to the rock upon which the earth rests. Whenever God wishes to destroy a town with an earthquake, He commands that mountain to shake, and it shakes the root that extends beneath that town. That is why one town shakes but not another.

Author's comments: Qummī narrates something similar to the words of ʿAbd Allāh b. Buraydah from Yaḥyā b. Maysirah al-Khathʿamī. He also narrates a tradition of a similar meaning that is discontinued (*mursal*) and implicit (*muḍmar*). It reads: "…it is a mountain that surrounds this world, behind which lurk God and Magog."

In any case, we cannot rely on such narrations and by today's standards their falsity is almost self-evident.

(4) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, about the verse *So the faithless say, "This is an odd thing…"* (50:2), we read:
It was revealed about Ubayy b. Khalf, who said to Abū Jahl: "Come and I will show you how to deal with Muḥammad!" Then he took a bone and crushed it, saying: "O Muḥammad! Do you claim this will live again?" So God said: *Rather they denied the truth when it came to them; so they are now in a perplexed state of affairs.*

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Verses 15–38

The first verse [in this set] completes the demonstration of God's knowledge and power from His creation of the heavens, the earth and the wonders they contain that was begun in the previous verses. This, in its entirety, the Qur'an calls *the first creation*. God asks: *Were We exhausted by the first creation?* And from this we extract the argument that the one who has the power to produce the first creation has the power to produce a second new creation and to have knowledge of it. This is because these two creations are alike; if He has the power to produce one, He has the power to produce the other; when He decides on a matter, He just says to it: "Be!" and it is.

From this, he turns to say that they are in doubt about the new creation despite the similarity of the two. Then he speaks about the first creation of the human being, how He knows the contents of his heart and how he has observers watching his every deed. After this, He describes how the agony of death brings the truth, followed by the Resurrection, followed by his admittance to heaven or hell. Then, again, God speaks about what became of past generations who denied the divine messengers; they were annihilated for having invited God's wrath, and they were more powerful than the people of Mecca. So whoever destroyed those past generations is surely able to destroy the present one.

أَفَعَيِينَا بِالْخَلْقِ الْأَوَّلِ ۚ بَلْ هُمْ فِي لَبْسٍ مِنْ خَلْقٍ جَدِيدٍ ﴿١٥﴾

(50:15) ***Were We exhausted by the first creation? Rather they are in doubt about a new creation.***

According to Rāghib, "Exhaustion" (*ʿayy*) means being unable to accomplish some speech or action. One says: "such-and-such exhausted me" or "I became exhausted with such-and-such" when one cannot accomplish it. The first creation is the creation of the current natural order, including the human being in his worldly existence. There is no basis for restricting the first creation to the creation of the heavens and earth alone, as Fakhr al-Rāzī inclines towards in his *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, nor for restricting it to the creation of just the human being, as some other commentators

have been inclined today. This is because the new creation encompasses the heavens, the earth and the human being altogether, as God says: *The day the earth is transformed into another earth and the heavens [as well], and they are presented before God, the One, the All-paramount* (14:48). The new creation will be the creation of a second world, namely the creation of the Hereafter. And the question posed at the beginning of this verse is for rhetorical effect.

In short, the verse means: "Were we unable to accomplish the first creation such that you would think us incapable of accomplishing the second?" In other words, we did not tire in the first creation which was originating the world, so we will not tire in the second creation which is bringing the world back.

But if we take *ʿayy* to signify exhaustion in the sense of tiredness, as some scholars have inclined towards, then this would mean: "Did we tire on account of the first creation such that it would be difficult for us to effect the new one?" This is like when a human being or any animal engages in strenuous work and becomes physically tired as result. They cannot do anything else afterwards; they cannot even repeat the work they have just done because it too is strenuous, even if they can do it the first time.

There is no problem with reading the verse with this meaning in mind, though it has been said that using *ʿayy* in the first sense is more eloquent Arabic. This is because it suggests the impossibility of accomplishing the action rather than its mere difficulty; the former is meant by the verse because the polytheists argued that the Resurrection was impossible rather than difficult.

Rather they are in doubt **(labs)** ***about a new creation***—*labs* here means "confusion" (*iltibās*), and *a new creation* (khalq jadīd) means making their existence in this world into another kind of existence, with its own order that is beyond the cosmic order that governs this world. This is because this new creation is supposed to be everlasting (*bāqī*) rather than transitory (*fānī*), and life without death. In this world, if the human being is felicitous, he shall have enjoyment unmixed with pain, and if he is wretched then he shall have pain unmixed with enjoyment. This is while the cosmic order that governs our present existence does not operate in this fashion.

In other words, God says: "Our knowledge and power were not exhausted when We first created this world, with its heavens and its earth and everything they contain, or when We ordered it in the best possible way. Therefore We are not unable to make this creation anew and replace

it with a new order, for there is no doubting Our power nor any confusion. Rather it is they, the polytheists, who are in doubt, which is why they cannot believe in a new creation."

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ وَنَعْلَمُ مَا تُوَسْوِسُ بِهِ نَفْسُهُ ۖ وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ ﴿١٦﴾

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(50:16) ***Certainly We have created man and We know to what his soul tempts him* (mā tawaswis bihi nafsuhu)*, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.***

Al-Rāghib says:

> "*Waswasah* means a wicked thought. Its etymological origin is *waswās* which is the sound of jewellery clinking or faint whispering."

When God says He has created man, He means his gradually changing existence, creation after creation, and not merely his original formation as a human being, even if the past tense verb is used here. He says: *Certainly We have created man* but the human being, like all creatures, has a certain allotted share of being, and just as he needs the generosity of his Lord just to exist in the first place, he also needs it to continue existing.

On the other hand, the conjunction *and We know to what his soul tempts him* is in the present continuous to signify its continuity from *certainly We have created man*, which carries the meaning of continuity even though it is grammatically in the past tense. The same is true of the phrase *and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein*, which signifies a fixed and unchanging reality conterminal with the human being's existence.

This verse has a connection with the evidence presented above for God's knowledge and power found in the first creation, especially the verses *Have they not then observed the heavens above them…*? (50:6), and *Rather they are in doubt about a new creation* (50:15), as this verse also occurs in the context of demonstrating God's power through the creation of the human being. Moreover, it illustrates His knowledge of him both through the mediation of the angels and in a direct and unmediated form:

*Certainly We have created man (*wa la qad khalaqna al-insān*)*—where the *lām* is for emphasis—demonstrates His power by affirming His creation. Meanwhile, *and We know to what his soul tempts him* refers to the subtlest and most hidden form of knowledge, namely the knowledge of

man's innermost thoughts. This demonstrates the all-encompassing reach of God's knowledge. It is as if to say: We know his outer reality and his inner one. We even know what His soul whispers to him, including the doubts he has about the Resurrection: "How will the human being be brought back when he has been reduced to dust and nothing visible of him remains?"

In the phrase *what his soul tempts him to* (mā tawaswis bihi nafsuhu), it is has become clear that *mā* is a relative noun (*ism mawṣūl*), while the pronoun in *bihi* refers to the human being and the *bā'* is either instrumental or causal. The act of *waswasah* is ascribed to the soul (*nafs*) rather than Satan, even if it can also be his action, because the current discourse is intended to demonstrate that God's knowledge encompasses every facet of the human being, even the secret thoughts that lurk in the deepest recesses of his soul.

…and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein **(ḥabl al-warīd)**—the *warīd* refers to the veins spread throughout the human body. It is said that it specifically refers to the jugular vein located in the neck. In any case, it is called a *ḥabl* (lit. "thread") because of its similarity to one, and the possessive construct *ḥabl al-warīd* is expository (*bayāniyyah*).

This means that we are nearer to the human being than the veins that spread throughout his body and into limbs, so how can we not know everything about him and his soul? This is a simple comparison which is easy for everyone to understand. However, the truth of God's nearness to us is much more exalted than this; it is He, after all, who made it a soul and bestowed its powers upon it. It is He who mediates between the soul and itself and between it and all of its powers and actions. So God is closer to the human being than everything; He is even closer to him than even the contents of his own soul. But this concept is not easy for most minds to assimilate, so God instead illustrated His nearness by saying: *We are nearer to him than his jugular vein*. This is similar in meaning to the verse: *God intervenes between a man and his heart* (8:24).

Commentators have found many other ways of understanding this verse which we have seen fit to omit. Interested readers can refer to their works.

إِذْ يَتَلَقَّى الْمُتَلَقِّيَانِ عَنِ الْيَمِينِ وَعَنِ الشِّمَالِ قَعِيدٌ ﴿١٧﴾

(50:17) ***When the twin recorders record*** **(yatalaqqā)**, ***seated on the***

right hand and on the left

Talaqqī means to take note; based on the context, the two recorders (*mutalaqqiyān*) are the angels to whom the human being is entrusted and who keep record of his deeds.

…seated on the right hand and on the left means on the right and left of the human being.

The adverbial (*ẓarf*) *when* appears to be connected to an implicit clause whose meaning is "And mention *when the twin records record.…*" This is intended to once again demonstrate God's knowledge of man's actions, this time by way of each person's record of deeds that is recorded by the angels, in addition to God's own direct knowledge of all things that He knows without mediation.

It is said that the adverbial *when* is connected to the previous verse *nearer to him…*, meaning: "We are nearer to him than his jugular vein when the two angels note down his deeds in writing." However, the first reading is more befitting to the tone of the verse, as the central purpose is to explain God's nearness to the human being and his knowledge of him. Everything else is mentioned for this purpose. Especially when we consider the verse that follows this one, the context suggests that both routes of knowledge—direct and via the recording angels—are intended to be considered separately.

It is said that the adverbial *when* is actually explanatory (*taʿlīliyyah*), as it explains how God obtains the knowledge of the human being which is suggested by the previous verse *We are nearer to him than his jugular vein*. However it does not accord with the general style of the Qur'an to argue that God has knowledge of something because His angels have knowledge of it, or because they have preserved it and written it down.

…seated on the right hand and on the left is supposed to illustrate the position of these angels in relation to the human being; the right side and the left side represent the two sides of good and evil. So each angel records a certain kind of action.

مَا يَلْفِظُ مِنْ قَوْلٍ إِلَّا لَدَيْهِ رَقِيبٌ عَتِيدٌ ﴿١٨﴾

(50:18) ***he says no word*** **(lafẓ)** ***but that there is a ready observer beside him***

Lafẓ literally means "to spit" but is used for speech (*takallum*) because

of the similarity between the two acts. An "observer" (*raqīb*) means one who watches over him, and "ready" (*ʿatīd*) means prepared to fulfil his duty.

This verse describes the way in which the recording angels observe what the human being says. Taken after the previous verse—*When the twin recorders record…*—this is a case of mentioning the specific after the general to show a special concern for it.

وَجَاءَتْ سَكْرَةُ الْمَوْتِ بِالْحَقِّ ۖ ذَٰلِكَ مَا كُنْتَ مِنْهُ تَحِيدُ ﴿١٩﴾

(50:19) ***Then the drunkenness of death brings the truth: "This is what you used to shun!"***

"To shun" (*ḥīd*) means to face away or to turn and run; the "drunkenness" (*sakrah*) of death refers to what the human being experiences as his soul is wrenched away, in that he is completely focused on himself and disconnected from others. In this sense he is like one intoxicated who does not know what he is saying or what is being said to him.

The drunkenness of death is said to bring the truth because this shows that even death is within the Divine Decree (*al-qaḍāʾ al-ilāhī*) and has a necessary role to play in the cosmic order. We can also grasp this from the verse, whose meaning we have already discussed: *Every soul shall taste death, and We will test you with good and ill by way of test, and to Us you will be brought back* (21:35). This means that death—which is merely moving from one abode to the next—is true, just as the Resurrection is true and just as heaven and hell are true. There are other opinions about what it means for death to bring the truth, but we do not see any value in mentioning them here.

"This is what you used to shun!" alludes to the fact that the human being is naturally averse to dying. This is because God has made the life of this world seem decorous to them, so that each person's attachment to worldly ornaments will be a trial and a test for them. God says: *Indeed We have made whatever is on the earth an adornment for it that We may test them which of them is best in conduct. And indeed We will turn whatever is on it into a barren plain* (18:8).

وَنُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ يَوْمُ الْوَعِيدِ ﴿٢٠﴾

(50:20) ***Then the Trumpet will be blown: "This is the threatened day."***

The blowing of the trumpet represents the second journey towards the realm of eternal life after the first journey, which was death. There are two blowings of the trumpet; the first one causes everything to pass away, and the second signals the beginning of the Hour. What is meant here is either the second blowing or both of them together.

The threatened day is the Day of Resurrection when God will carry out his threat of punishment for the sinners amongst His servants.

وَجَاءَتْ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَعَهَا سَائِقٌ وَشَهِيدٌ ﴿٢١﴾

(50:21) ***Then every soul will come accompanied by a driver and a witness***

A *driver* (sāʾiq) is one who urges cattle forward along a trail from behind them, as opposed to a "leader" (*qāʾid*) who leads them from in front.

Then every soul will come—meaning they will come and stand before God for judgement, as shown by the verse: *that day he shall be driven toward your Lord* (75:30). In other words, every soul will stand before Him, accompanied by a driver urging it forward and a witness that testifies to its deeds. God does not explicitly state that they are angels or the recorders of deeds. However, the context of the preceding verses gives us the impression that these are angels, and we will discuss the narrations in this regard below.

By the same token, He does not say that only the aforementioned witness will be testifying to the soul's deeds. In fact there are verses which say there will be many witnesses on the Day of Judgement, which suggests this will not be the only one. The same can be said of the following verses which describe how the human being will be accused and show that there will be more than just a driver and a witness with him on that day.

لَقَدْ كُنْتَ فِي غَفْلَةٍ مِنْ هَذَا فَكَشَفْنَا عَنْكَ غِطَاءَكَ فَبَصَرُكَ الْيَوْمَ حَدِيدٌ ﴿٢٢﴾

(50:22) ***You were certainly oblivious of this. We have removed your veil from you, and so your sight is acute today.***

That this statement appears in the midst of verses describing the Day of Resurrection indicates that it is one of the things that will be spoken

on that day. The speaker is God and the one spoken to is the human being mentioned in the previous verse: *Then every soul will come*…. Therefore, this statement is addressed to each and every human being. However, its rebuking tone might suggest that this is specifically addressed to those who deny the Resurrection. Moreover, all of these verses appear in the context of refuting those who deny the Resurrection, as represented by the words, above: *What! When we are dead and have become dust? That is a far-fetched return!* (50:3)

This means that which the human being sees visibly on that day; namely that all his means are cut-off, that all things are futile and that everything must now return to the Almighty. In this world, the human being clung to whatever apparent means he had at his disposal, but his reliance on them rendered him oblivious to this reality, until God lifted the veil from his eyes and the truth became clear to him. Now he does not merely know it as an idea, but perceives it directly as a fact.

That is why God says *You were certainly oblivious*… in this world. The Arabic says *fī ghaflah*, which literally means "in unawareness", as if this unawareness surrounded the human being entirely. …*of this* that you now see with your own eyes. Even if your sight was acute in this world, your dependence on worldly means distracted you and rendered you unaware. But *We have removed your veil from you and so your sight*…—meaning the sight and perception of the heart—…*is acute*…—meaning penetrating; you see now what you did not see in this world—…*today*—on the Day of Judgement.

From this verse it becomes clear, firstly, that the Day of Resurrection is a day on which the veil of ignorance is lifted from the human being, allowing him to see things as they really are. There are many other verses in a similar vein, for instance: *all command that day will belong to God* (82:19) and "*To whom does the sovereignty belong today?*" "*To God, the One, the All-paramount!*" (40:16)

Secondly, this verse shows that whatever the human being witnesses on the Day of Resurrection already exists ready for him while he is in this world. However, in this world he is unaware of it; he only becomes aware of it on the Day of Resurrection, the day on which the veil is lifted and the human being sees what is beyond it. This is because we can only say someone is "unaware" (*ghāfil*) of something that is real and already existing, and the image of a veil obstructing his sight implies that there is something hidden behind it. Moreover, it only makes a difference if

someone's sight is not acute if there is something visibly there that he fails to perceive.

One of the most nonsensical interpretations of this verse is that God is addressing His Prophet in it, with the meaning: "Before you were sent as a messenger, you were unaware of that which we reveal to you. But we have lifted the veil from your eyes and now you see clearly; you see the revelation or the angel of revelation and receive it." This reading does not fit with the verse at all, nor do any of the words in the verse indicate such a meaning.

وَقَالَ قَرِينُهُ هَٰذَا مَا لَدَيَّ عَتِيدٌ ﴿٢٣﴾

(50:23) ***Then his companion will say, "This is what is ready with me"***

The tone of this verse suggests that this companion (*qarīn*) is the angel appointed over him. If the driver is speaking, then *this* refers to the human being that is present with him. If it is the witness, then *this* refers to the deeds to which he testifies, namely: "these are his deeds ready with me."

It is said that *his companion* (qarīn) means the devil who accompanies him and tempts him, in which case *this* refers to "this person whose affairs I have taken control of is ready to enter hell."

أَلْقِيَا فِي جَهَنَّمَ كُلَّ كَفَّارٍ عَنِيدٍ ﴿٢٤﴾ مَنَّاعٍ لِلْخَيْرِ مُعْتَدٍ مُرِيبٍ ﴿٢٥﴾

(50:24–25) ***"The two of you cast every obdurate disbeliever (kaffār ʿanīd) into hell; hinderer of all good, transgressor (mutʿadī), and skeptic (murīb)…"***

Kaffār is the noun of magnification (*ism al-mubālaghah*) for *kufr* ("ingratitude" or "disbelief"); *ʿanīd* means someone who is obstinately opposed to the truth and persists in this obstinacy; *muʿtadī* means someone who oversteps the bounds or misses the truth; *murīb* is someone who is in doubt or who causes doubt in the matter of the Resurrection.

There is an element of interconnectedness between these five qualities; when a person disbelieves in an extreme way by rejecting every truth he encounters, this engenders obstinacy towards the truth, and when someone is persistently obstinate, they hinder most kinds of goodness as there is nothing good save in the truth and on its side. This in turn leads someone to overstep the bounds of truth into falsehood and causes the

human being to exceed the limits of divine servanthood (ʿ*ubūdiyyah*) and enter the realms of arrogance and rebellion. He in turn causes people to doubt what he rejects from the true religion.

It is God who is the speaker of these words on the Day of Resurrection; the context would suggest that he is addressing them to the two angels—the driver and the witness—although some commentators have allowed the possibility that it could be directed to two of the angels who are custodians of hell.

الَّذِى جَعَلَ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَـٰهًا آخَرَ فَأَلْقِيَاهُ فِى الْعَذَابِ الشَّدِيدِ ﴿٢٦﴾

(50:26) ***"…who has set up another god along with God! So the two of you cast him into the severe punishment."***

Rather than simply say "idolater" (*mushrik*) for brevity (*ījāz*), God opts to speak at length (*iṭnāb*), saying *Who has set up…*. This is to emphasize that this attribute is the gravest of all sins and the mother of all misdeeds—the source of all the vices enumerated above: faithlessness, obstinacy, hindering good, transgression and scepticism.

So the two of you cast him… is repeated to emphasise the command, implying that idolatry (*shirk*) has made this even more severe, which is why God says *…cast him into the severe punishment*.

قَالَ قَرِينُهُ رَبَّنَا مَا أَطْغَيْتُهُ وَلَـٰكِن كَانَ فِى ضَلَالٍ بَعِيدٍ ﴿٢٧﴾

(50:27) ***His companion will say, "Our Lord! I did not make him a rebel, but he was in extreme error."***

This companion (*qarīn*) is undoubtedly the devil assigned to accompany each human being. On many occasions throughout the Qur'an, God speaks about there being a companion from the devils who accompanies every human being and whispers to him to try and lead him astray. For example, we read: *Whoever turns a blind eye to the remembrance of the All-beneficent, We assign him a devil who remains his companion. Indeed they bar them from the way while they suppose that they are guided. When he comes to Us, he will say, "I wish there had been between me and you the distance between east and west! What an evil companion!"* (43:36–38)

So in the present verse we are told that this devil who accompanies him will say: *Our Lord…!* acknowledging God's Lordship both over him and the human being he is with because they are wrangling before him; *I did*

not make him a rebel…—I did not compel him to rebel against you—… *but he was in extreme error*—he was ready and willing to accept what I told him of his own free will, so I am not responsible for his sins. And we have already discussed the quarrelling of the wrongdoers and their spouses in our commentary on the verses beginning: *Muster the wrongdoers and their mates and what they used to worship*… (37:22).

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قَالَ لَا تَخْتَصِمُوا لَدَيَّ وَقَدْ قَدَّمْتُ إِلَيْكُمْ بِالْوَعِيدِ ﴿٢٨﴾

(50:28) ***He will say, "Do not wrangle in My presence, for I had already sent ahead the warning to you...."***

Again, the speaker in this verse is God who addresses them. It is as if He is addressing all of the rebellious idolaters and their companions at once, and then this devolves into particular addresses to each person and his companions, as when we would say: "Let not the two of you wrangle in My presence…."

I had already sent ahead the warning to you is a circumstantial qualifier (*ḥāl*) for the subject (*fāʿil*) of the verb *Do not wrangle*… (lā takhtaṣimū), while *the warning* (bi al-waʿīd) is the object (*mafʿūl*) of the verb *sent ahead* (qaddamtu) and the *bāʾ* is connective (*waṣlah*).

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In other words: "Do not wrangle in my presence as it will not benefit you in the slightest; I have already conveyed my warning to those who associate partners with Me and do wrong." The warning he sent in advance is like his words to Iblīs: *Said He, "Begone! Whoever of them follows you, indeed the hell shall be your requital, an ample reward"* (17:63) and "*Had We wished We would have given every soul its guidance, but My word became due: 'Surely I will fill hell with all the [guilty] jinn and humans'"* (32:13).

مَا يُبَدَّلُ الْقَوْلُ لَدَيَّ وَمَا أَنَا بِظَلَّامٍ لِلْعَبِيدِ ﴿٢٩﴾

(50:29) ***"The word is unalterable with Me, and I am not tyrannical to the servants."***

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The surrounding verses suggest that this verse is separate from the one before it and serves as a response to an implied question, namely: "Suppose you have given this warning afore, will you not change it or forgo?" God replies: *The word is unalterable with Me*…—"the word" (*al-qawl*) means anything He has definitively decreed, and He has decreed that whoever dies upon disbelief must enter hell. This decree is the warning that God

gave to Iblīs and those who follow him.

Having clarified that this verse is separate from the one before it and that to alter the word means to alter God's definitive decree, *with Me* is semantically connected to *unalterable*. This is what the context suggests. However, some commentators have given different interpretations of this sentence's syntax and meaning, and many convoluted possibilities that do not add anything to the discussion save obscurity. For this reason we have seen fit to omit them.

…and I am not tyrannical* (ẓullām) *to the servants complements the meaning of the previous sentence, namely: "There is no alteration to My word—you will be punished without doubt. But I am not treating My servants unjustly in doing this; I sent a warning ahead to them. So they have no excuse for their actions."

From another angle, this also means that there is no injustice in God requiting his servants with punishment; they are only requited with the deeds that they sent ahead for themselves. Their punishment is merely their deeds being returned to them, as we read in the verse: *O faithless ones! Do not make any excuses today. You are only being requited with what you used to do* (66:7).

The word *ẓullām* is a noun of magnification, hence saying "I am not tyrannical" negates egregious acts of injustice from God. However, this does not imply that God can commit minor injustices, as if God were unjust in any aspect of the recompense (*jazāʾ*), this would constitute a terrible injustice, because of how many instances that injustice would affect. Remember, God addresses every single wrongdoer who associated partners with Him along with his companion, and these are many in number; so, if He was unjust in any way, he would have been tyrannical (*ẓullām*) by quantity alone.

يَوْمَ نَقُولُ لِجَهَنَّمَ هَلِ امْتَلَأْتِ وَتَقُولُ هَلْ مِنْ مَزِيدٍ ﴿٣٠﴾

(50:30) ***The day when We shall say to hell, "Are you full?" It will say, "Is there any more?"***

In this verse, God appears to speak to hell and hell to answer Him. Commentators have disagreed about the nature of this exchange, with some saying that the question and response allegorize the situation (*al-khiṭāb wa al-jawāb bi lisān al-ḥāl*). However, were this the case it would not only apply to God; everyone who saw hell would ask whether

it was full and it would respond: "Is there any more?" So there would be no apparent reason to say that God alone was addressing hell.

They have also suggested than in reality the words are addressed to the custodians of hell and the response is theirs also, and if these are ascribed to hell then this goes against the apparent meaning of the verse without any evidence to permit this.

Another suggestion is that the question and answer are actually as the verse describes them and there is no reason to suppose that they need be otherwise; God has told us that He will inspire people's hands, feet and skin to speak, along with other seemingly inanimate objects. This is apposite, and we have already discussed in Sūrah Fuṣṣilat that all beings have some degree of knowledge and awareness.

Are you full? is a rhetorical question, as is *Is there any more?* and perhaps this exchange takes place to show that God's might and punishment do not fall short of encompassing the wrongdoers and giving them their just desserts, as God says elsewhere: *indeed hell besieges the faithless* (9:49).

Some have objected that this contradicts God's explicit statement elsewhere: *I will surely fill hell with you and all of those who follow you*. (38:85) It can be said that "to fill" (*imtilāʾ*) means something has been filled to capacity, as when we describe a place as "filled with people." However, this exchange could take place before all of hell's inhabitants have entered it.

It is said that the rhetorical question *Is there any more?* is meant to imply the negative, namely: "No more! There is no room for any more than you have cast in so far, for I am full!" In which case this exchange alludes to God's decree in the verse: *Surely I will fill hell with the jinn and humans* (32:13). In this case, when God says *Are you full?* this invokes the meaning of the same verse: *But My word became due: "Surely I will fill…"* and hell's response is an affirmation of that.

This interpretation might be supported if we read *the word* in the previous verse (*the word is unalterable with Me*) as referring to *the word* in *But My word became due: "Surely I will fill hell with the jinn and humans."*

وَأُزْلِفَتِ الْجَنَّةُ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ غَيْرَ بَعِيدٍ ﴿٣١﴾

(50:31) *And paradise will be brought near* (uzlifat) *for the Godwary, not distant* (ghayr baʿīd)

Now God begins to describe the condition of the Godwary on the Day of Resurrection. *Izlāf* means to bring something close; *ghayr baʿīd*

is said to be an adjective for an implicit adverb, namely: "in a place that is not distant."

So this means: on that Day paradise will be brought near to the Godwary while they are in a place that is not far away; in other words it will be right in front of them and they will have no difficulty entering it.

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هَٰذَا مَا تُوعَدُونَ لِكُلِّ أَوَّابٍ حَفِيظٍ ﴿٣٢﴾

(50:32) ***"This is what you were promised. For every penitent* (awwāb)** ***and dutiful one* (ḥafīẓ)"**

This refers to the rewards they were promised beforehand; *awwāb* is derived from *awb* ("to return") and someone who returns to God abundantly through repentance and obedience; *ḥafīẓ* is someone who constantly observes the prohibitions God has enjoined upon him. The sentence *For every penitent and dutiful one* is either a second predicate (meaning: "… this is for every penitent and dutiful one") or a circumstantial qualifier.

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مَنْ خَشِيَ الرَّحْمَٰنَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَجَاءَ بِقَلْبٍ مُنِيبٍ ﴿٣٣﴾

(50:33) ***"who fears the All-beneficent in the unseen and comes with a penitent* (munīb)** ***heart"***

This is an exposition (*bayān*) of *every penitent and dutiful one*. Fearing God "in the unseen" (*bi al-ghayb*) means fearing His punishment while it is hidden and not visible. *Munīb* is from *inābah*, meaning to return; coming to God with a penitent heart (*qalb munīb*) means to have spent one's life turning to God such that you come to Him with a heart enveloped with this quality.

ادْخُلُوهَا بِسَلَامٍ ۖ ذَٰلِكَ يَوْمُ الْخُلُودِ ﴿٣٤﴾

(50:34) ***"Enter it in peace! This is the day of immortality."***

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This is what will be said to the Godwary: *Enter it in peace* means to enter it in good health and security from every evil or harmful thing, or with God and His angels invoking peace upon you. *This is the day of immortality* is a glad tiding the Godwary are given.

لَهُمْ مَا يَشَاءُونَ فِيهَا وَلَدَيْنَا مَزِيدٌ ﴿٣٥﴾

(50:35) ***They will have whatever they wish in it, and with Us there is yet more.***

It is possible that *in it* (fī hā) is connected to *they wish*. Alternatively, it could be connected to an implicit circumstantial qualifier (*hāl maḥdhūf*) for the relative noun ("whatever"—*mā*), which would render the meaning: "While what they wish is in it." Another possibility is that it is connected to an implicit pronoun that refers to this relative noun, meaning: "They will have whatever they wish while it is there." However, the first of the three is more appropriate for God's boundlessness.

In short, this means that while the inhabitants of paradise are in paradise, they shall have whatever they desire, no matter what it is, without limit or exception. So they shall have whatever they wish for or desire were they to wish for it.

And with Us there is yet more—meaning, based on the context, that we have even more than that for them. They already have everything they could possibly want, meaning whatever objects or goals they could potentially conceive of, so *yet more* means something so tremendous in its perfection that they cannot even think of it.

It is said that *yet more* should be understood as yet more of whatever things they desire. So if they desire provision, for instance, they are given more than they desire, and something better and more wonderful than it. It has been related from some commentators that a cloud will pass over them and ask: "What do you desire?" Then it will rain down upon them. There is nothing they desire save that it rains upon them. However, this unnecessarily restricts the meaning of the verse. The apparent meaning of the phrase *they will have whatever they wish in it* already indicates that they have everything they could possibly desire, not that they are given it. Therefore *yet more* must be something beyond what they could possibly desire.

It is said: This means that their good deeds will be multiplied tenfold. However, this too unnecessarily restricts the meaning.

وَكَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا قَبْلَهُمْ مِنْ قَرْنٍ هُمْ أَشَدُّ مِنْهُمْ بَطْشًا فَنَقَّبُوا فِي الْبِلَادِ هَلْ مِنْ مَحِيصٍ ﴿٣٦﴾

(50:36) ***How many generations We have destroyed before them, who were stronger than these insomuch that they ransacked the***

towns?! Is there any escape?

This verse appends the above argument from God's creation of the human being, His knowledge of him and his journey toward his Creator with a threat and a warning. This is similar to what we saw at the beginning of the sūrah when God made an argument for the Resurrection and followed it with a threat: *The people of Noah denied before them, and the inhabitants of Rass and Thamūd*… (50:12).

It means: We have destroyed many people before the idolaters of this generation, and these past generations were stronger than them such that they ravaged the land, conquered towns and ruled over them, so is there any refuge or escape from God's punishment and destruction?

إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَذِكْرَىٰ لِمَن كَانَ لَهُ قَلْبٌ أَوْ أَلْقَى السَّمْعَ وَهُوَ شَهِيدٌ ﴿٣٧﴾

(50:37) ***There is indeed an admonition in that for one who has a heart or gives ear, being attentive.***

The heart (*qalb*) is what the human being reasons with (*yaʿqul bih*) to discern truth from falsehood, good from evil and benefit from harm; so if the human being does not reflect and does not use it to discern, then it is as if he has no heart as it has no effect on his existence. So its existence or non-existence are the same for him. To "give ear" (*ilqāʾ al-samʿ*) means to listen, as if your hearing was something you gave to the person you are listening to and which he took hold of, and "being attentive" (*shahīd*) means someone who is present and an onlooker.

This means that the realities we have recounted to you and the stories of these perished nations contain lessons for those who reflect, search for the truth and choose that which is good and beneficial to them, or for those who will listen to true speech and not allow themselves to be distracted—who are not just physically but also mentally present and comprehend what they hear.

The juxtaposition of *one who has a heart* and *one who gives ear* is because someone who believes in the truth is one of two persons. He is either an intelligent person who is capable of grasping the truth—someone who ponders, sees what the truth is and then willingly acknowledges it—or he is someone who cannot ponder in this way to discern what is true, good and beneficial independently; he must listen to what someone else says and follows it. However someone who neither has a heart nor

listens attentively to the message and warning he is being given is wilfully ignorant (*jāhil mutaʿannit*) who has neither heart nor hearing: *And they will say, "Had we listened or applied reason, we would not have been among inmates of the Blaze"* (67:10).

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ وَمَا مَسَّنَا مِنْ لُغُوبٍ ﴿٣٨﴾

(50:38) ***Certainly We created the heavens and the earth, and whatever is between them, in six days, and any fatigue*** **(lughūb)** ***did not touch Us.***

Lughūb means toil and planting. The meaning of this verse is clear.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Tawḥīd* it is narrated from ʿAmr b. Shimr, from Jābir b. Yazīd: I asked Abū Jaʿfar [Imām al-Bāqir] about the verse *Were We exhausted by the first creation? Rather they are in doubt about a new creation.*

He said: "O Jābir! The interpretation (*taʾwīl*) of that is when God annihilates this creation and this world, and the inhabitants of paradise are in paradise and the inmates of hell are in hell, God will create a world that is other than this world. He will produce a new creation without male and female, and they will worship Him and declare His unity, and He will create a new earth that is not this one to carry them, and heavens that are not these heavens to shade them. Perhaps you think that God has only created this one world, or your think that God has not created any people except you! Oh yes, God has created a million worlds and a million Adams. You are just in the last of them, and those are the Adamites."

Author's comments: The first section of this tradition is narrated in *Khiṣāl* from Muḥammad b. Muslim from him. Perhaps when the Imām says that this is the interpretation of the verse, he means that it is something that applies to it.

(2) In *Jawāmiʿ al-Jāmiʿ*, it is narrated from the Prophet:

The writer of good deeds is on a man's right side while the writer of evil deeds is on his left, but the one on the right has authority

over the one on the left. So when a person does a good deed, the one on the right records it as ten, but when he does a bad deed the one on the right says to his companion on the left: "Give him seven hours [before you record it], for he may glorify God or repent."

Author's comments: Other narrations to this effect have been transmitted, with some saying six hours instead of seven.

(3) In *Nahj al-Balāghah*:

Then every soul will come accompanied by a driver and a witness (50:21)—a driver who drives it towards its mustering and a witness who testifies to its deeds.

(4) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, it is narrated by Abū al-Qāsim al-Hasakānī, in a chain from al-Aʿmash, who narrates from Abū al-Mutawakkil al-Tājir from Abū al-Saʿīd al-Khudrī that God's Messenger said: On the Day of Resurrection, God will tell me and ʿAlī: "Cast those who hated you into hellfire and admit to paradise those who loved you. That is the meaning of the verse: '*The two of you cast every obdurate disbeliever into hell*'" (50:24).

Author's comments: Shaykh al-Ṭūsī narrates it in his *Amālī* with a chain from Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī from the Prophet.

(5) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr* it is narrated by Ibn Abī al-Dunyā in *Dhikr al-Mawt*, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Abū Naʿīm in his *Ḥilyah* from Jābir b. ʿAbd Allāh:

I heard God's Messenger say: "The son of Adam is indeed unaware of what was created for him. When God wanted to create him, He told the angel: 'Write down his provision. Write down his effects. Write down his term, whether felicitous or wretched.' Then that angel ascended and God dispatched another angel to protect him and then that angel ascended. Then God entrusted him to two angels who write down his good deeds and evil ones, and when death comes to him, those two angels ascend also, and the angel of death comes to take his soul. Then when he places him into his grave, he returns the soul to his body and the two angels of the grave come to him, test him and depart. Then when the Hour sets in, the angel of good deeds and the angel of bad deeds come to him and they open the two books hung around his neck. They come with him—one as the driver and one as the witness."

Then God's Messenger said: "Your coming is a grave affair. You

cannot imagine it. So seek help with God the Almighty."

(6) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī* about the verse *The day when We shall say to hell, "Are you full?" It will say, "Is there any more?"* (50:30):
God asks this question because He promised to fill hellfire; He fills it and then asks: "Are you full?" It says: "Is there any more?" as a rhetorical question, meaning: "There is no more!"

Author's comments: This assumes that the rhetorical question is meant to suggest the negative.

(7) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is narrated by Aḥmad, Bukhārī, Muslim, Tirmidhī, Nasāʾī, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Mardawayh, Bayhaqī in his *al-Asmāʾ wa al-Ṣifāt*, from Anas:
God's Messenger said: "People will be thrown into hell and it will ask: 'Is there any more?' until the Almighty places his foot in it and hell contracts saying: 'Enough! Enough! By your Might!' But there will always be room in paradise, even if God were to create another race and lodge them all in the palaces of paradise."

Author's comments: God placing his foot in hellfire and it calling out: "Enough! Enough!" is narrated in many Sunni traditions.

(8) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī* about the verse: *They will have whatever they wish in it, and with Us there is yet more* (50:35):
This refers to God's abundant mercy.

(9) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is narrated by al-Bazzāaz, Ibn Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn Mardawayh, Lālkāʾī in his *Sunnah* and Bayhaqī in his *al-Baʿth wa al-Nushūr*, from Anas about the verse *and with Us there is yet more*:
God will make Himself appear to them.

(10) In *al-Kāfī*, it is narrated from "some of our companions"—with a gap in the chain (*marfūʿ*)—from Hishām b. al-Ḥakam who said: Abū al-Ḥasan Mūsā b. Jaʿfar [Imām al-Kāẓim] told me: "O Hishām! God says in His Book: *There is indeed an admonition in that for one who has a heart* (50:37), meaning an intellect (*ʿaql*)."

(11) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr* it is narrated by Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī in his *Tārīkh*, from ʿAwwām b. Hawbash:
I asked Abū Mujliz about a man who sits with his legs crossed. He said: "There is no problem with that; it was only the Jews who disliked it. They claimed that God created the heavens and the earth in six days and then rested on the Sabbath sitting in that way. Then God sent down the verse: *Certainly We created the heavens*

and the earth, and whatever is between them, in six days, and any fatigue did not touch Us (50:38)."

Author's comments: The same meaning is narrated from Ḍaḥḥāk and Qatādah, and Mufīd narrates this same meaning in *Rawḍat al-Wāʿiẓīn* in a weak narration. It was in the Torah that the creation of everything was originally allotted to six days of the week and, even if the Qur'an repeats this trope, it does not suggest that these refer to the six days of the week.

It is on the basis of these narrations that some say this verse was revealed in Medina. However, just because it refutes the beliefs of the Jews, this does not necessitate that it is of Medinan provenance as there are many Meccan verses that speak about the Jews, such as verses in Sūrah al-Aʿrāf and other places.

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Verses 39–45

The conclusion of this sūrah instructs the Prophet to patiently bear the defamation he was suffering from his opponents who accused him of being a magician, madman or poet, as well as their obstinate mockery of the Resurrection and Return. God instructs him to be patient and worship his Lord by praising Him, to expect the Resurrection by awaiting the Cry (*ṣayḥah*) and to admonish those who fear God in the unseen with the Qur'an.

فَاصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَقُولُونَ وَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ قَبْلَ طُلُوعِ الشَّمْسِ وَقَبْلَ الْغُرُوبِ ﴿٣٩﴾

(50:39) ***So be patient over what they say, and glorify the praise of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before the sunset….***

This verse follows logically from everything that has been said so far in the sūrah, both about the polytheists' denial of the Resurrection, the detailed description of the Resurrection and arguments for it, and the warning to those who deny it and reject the Prophet that they will suffer the same fate as those who denied in nations past.

*And glorify (*sabbiḥ*) the praise of your Lord—tasbīḥ* means to declare God as free from whatever they ascribe to him, accompanied by praise (*ḥamd*). In short, this means to ascribe beautiful acts to God and negate all shortcoming and deficiency from Him. Glorifying Him before the rising of the Sun could refer to the morning prayer (*ṣalāt al-subḥ*), while glorifying Him before its setting could refer to the afternoon prayer (*ṣalāt al-ʿaṣr*), or to both the afternoon prayer and the noon prayer (*ṣalāt al-ẓuhr*).

وَمِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَسَبِّحْهُ وَأَدْبَارَ السُّجُودِ ﴿٤٠﴾

(50:40) ***…and glorify Him through part of the night and after the prostrations***

This means to spend some part of the night glorifying Him, which could refer to the prayers of sunset (*maghrib*) and evening (*ʿīshāʾ*). *And*

*after the prostrations (*adbār al-sujūd*)—adbār* is the plural of *dubr* which means the end of something and after it; *after the prostrations* means after the prayers are finished, as the prostration is the last part of the prayer. So this can refer to the supplications recited immediately after praying (*taʿqībāt al-ṣalāt*). It is said that this refers to offering the supererogatory (*nawāfil*) prayers after the obligatory ones (*farāʾiḍ*), or that it refers to the two or more units of prayer (*rakʿah*) after sunset prayer, or that it refers to the unit of *witr* prayer offered at the end of the night.

وَاسْتَمِعْ يَوْمَ يُنَادِ الْمُنَادِ مِنْ مَكَانٍ قَرِيبٍ ﴿٤١﴾

(50:41) ***And hearken for the day when the caller calls from a close quarter.…***

Commentators have interpreted *hearken* (istamiʿ) in a number of ways, the most appropriate of which is something akin to "expect" (*intiẓār*); *the day when the caller calls* is the object of this verb. This renders the meaning: "Expect a day when the caller calls, giving ear to his call." *The caller calls* means when the angel of the trumpet blows into it, as indicated by the following verse.

The fact that this call is from *a closer quarter* (makān qarīb) is because the call encompasses all mankind; everyone will hear it equally well, so it makes no difference whether one is near or far. This is the call of the Resurrection and the word of life.

يَوْمَ يَسْمَعُونَ الصَّيْحَةَ بِالْحَقِّ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ يَوْمُ الْخُرُوجِ ﴿٤٢﴾

(50:42) ***…the day when they hear the Cry in truth. That is the day of rising.***

This is an exposition (*bayān*) of *the day when the caller calls*. The Cry is *in truth* (bi al-ḥaqq) because it is the result of God's definitive decree (*qaḍāʾ*), as we saw in the above verse: *Then the drunkenness of death brings the truth* (50:19).

That is the day of rising—meaning the day when the dead will rise from their graves: *the day when they emerge from the graves, hastening, as if racing toward a target* (70:43).

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نُحْيِي وَنُمِيتُ وَإِلَيْنَا الْمَصِيرُ ﴿٤٣﴾

(50:43) ***Indeed it is We who give life and bring death, and toward Us is the destination.***

"Giving life" (*iḥyāʾ*) means to imbue bodies with life in this world, and "bringing death" (*imātah*) means causing the living to die in this world and move to the world of the grave; based on the context, *toward Us is the destination* alludes to giving life at the Resurrection.

يَوْمَ تَشَقَّقُ الْأَرْضُ عَنْهُمْ سِرَاعًا ۚ ذَٰلِكَ حَشْرٌ عَلَيْنَا يَسِيرٌ ﴿٤٤﴾

(50:44) ***The day the earth is split open*** **(tashaqqaq)** ***from them, hastening. That mustering is easy for Us.***

Tashaqqaq means it will crack apart around them and they will come out hastening towards the caller. *That mustering is easy for Us* means that everything We mentioned—splitting open the earth, bringing the people hastening from the graves and gathering them together—is easy for Us.

نَحْنُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يَقُولُونَ ۖ وَمَا أَنْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِجَبَّارٍ ۖ فَذَكِّرْ بِالْقُرْآنِ مَنْ يَخَافُ وَعِيدِ ﴿٤٥﴾

(50:45) ***We know best what they say, and you are not to be a tyrant*** **(jabbār)** ***over them. So admonish by the Qur'an him who fears My threat.***

A *jabbār* is a dictator who forces (*yajbur*) people to do what he wants. So this means: Patiently endure what they say, glorify the praise of your Lord and expect the Resurrection. After all, We know best what they say and We will recompense them for what they do; you are not there as a tyrant to force them to believe in God and the Last Day. And if this is their condition, then admonish those who fear My threat with the Qur'an.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is narrated by Ṭabarānī in his *Awsaṭ* and Ibn ʿAsākir from Jarīr b. ʿAbd Allāh from the Prophet:
And celebrate the praise of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before the sunset (50:39)—before the rising of the sun is the morning prayer, and before the sunset is the afternoon prayer.

(2) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, it is narrated that someone asked Abū ʿAbd

Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq] about the verse: *and celebrate the praise of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before the sunset*. He said: Say in the morning and the evening ten times each: "There is no god except God, alone no partner hath He. His is the kingdom and His is the praise. And He hath power over all things." (*Lā ilāha illā Allāh waḥdahu lā sharīka lahu, lahu al-mulk wa lahu al-ḥamd, wa huwwa ʿalā kulli shayʾ qadīr.*)

Author's comments: This is based on the use of the word *tasbīḥ* ("glorification") in the verse, and even if it is being used specifically for the prayers there is no contradiction here.

(3) In *al-Kāfī* it is narrated from Ḥarīz from Zurārah:
I asked Abū Jaʿfar [Imām al-Bāqir] about the verse: *and after the prostrations (*adbār al-sujūd*)* (50:40).
He said: "Units of prayer after sunset [prayer]."

Author's comments: Qummī narrates a similar tradition in his *Tafsīr* from Ibn Abī Naṣr, from al-Riḍā. It reads: "Four units of prayer after sunset [prayer]."

(4) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is narrated by Musaddid in his *Musnad*, Ibn Mundhir and Ibn Mardawayh from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib:
I asked God's Messenger about the *adbār* of prostrations and stars. He said: "*Adbār al-sujūd* means two units of prayer after sunset prayer, while *adbār al-nujūm* means the two units of prayer before morning."

Author's comments: Something similar has been narrated by Ibn ʿAbbās and ʿUmar from him, and in *Majmaʿ* it is ascribed to al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī from the Prophet.

(5) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, about the verse *So admonish by the Qur'an him who fears My threat*, we read:
Admonish them, O Muḥammad, with the punishment We have promised.

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Chapter 51

Sūrah al-al-Dhāriyāt

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Verses 1–19

بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

The Prophetic mission called the idolaters to believe in Divine Unity in Lordship (*tawḥīd al-rubūbiyyah*): that God was their Lord (*rabb*) and the Lord of all things. The Prophet called them to this belief with a mixture of glad tidings and warnings, warning especially those who denied that God could punish them in this world by destroying them and in the Hereafter with everlasting punishment on the Day of Judgement. This is essential for the success of the Prophet's mission as, were there no accounting or recompense on the Day of Resurrection, then there would be no point or benefit for believing in monotheism or prophethood.

By taking up deities other than God, the polytheists had grievously rejected the doctrines of Divine Unity (*tawḥīd*), Prophethood (*nubuwwah*), and the Resurrection (*maʿād*). They were especially obstinate in their rejection of the Resurrection and would persistently deny it and mock it in any way they could. This was because in the falsity of the Resurrection they saw the falsity of the other two doctrines.

This sūrah discusses the Resurrection and their denial of it; it begins with this discussion and concludes with it. However, it does not discuss the Resurrection in of itself but insofar as it is a Day of recompense (*jazāʾ*) and that it is God, their Lord, who has promised them this day, and there is no doubt in God's promise.

Therefore, when the discussion turns to arguments for the Resurrection, God employs evidence for Divine Unity in the heavens, the earth, and souls, as well as the punishments God inflicted on previous nations after inviting them to believe in Divine Unity and their rejection of His messengers. This is done only in order to establish Divine Unity to establish thereby the Day of Recompense which God has promised, and that God

does not break His promises which He has given to His messengers. In this way, He undercuts their rejection of the Recompense, which they had relied on in their efforts to nullify the doctrine of divine unity and the prophetic mission because, without the Resurrection, belief in these two doctrines is meaningless, as we have already said.

The sūrah is of Meccan provenance, as shown by the tone of its verses, and there is no disagreement about this. One of its finest verses is: *I did not create the jinn and the humans except that they may worship Me* (51:56).

The first group of verses we will discuss represent the opening of the discussion, which declare that the recompense they have been promised is real and that their rejection of it is a falsehood. Then it describes the Day of Recompense and the condition of the Godwary and the deniers on it.

وَالذَّارِيَاتِ ذَرْوًا ﴿١﴾ فَالْحَامِلَاتِ وِقْرًا ﴿٢﴾ فَالْجَارِيَاتِ يُسْرًا ﴿٣﴾ فَالْمُقَسِّمَاتِ أَمْرًا ﴿٤﴾

(51:1–4) ***By the stirrers who stir; then the bearers of burdens; then those which glide gently; then those who dispense a command….***

"To stir" (*dharw*) means when the wind stirs up the dust and carries it into the air; a "burden" (*wiqr*) means a heavy load, whether carried on the outside or the inside.

These verses are a series of oaths, signifying emphasis (*taʾkīd*) upon emphasis on what will be made their object, namely the recompense for people's actions.

By the stirrers who stir… is an oath sworn by the winds that stir up the dust.

Then the bearers of burdens… is an oath sword by the rain-clouds laden with water; *then* (fa) signifies emphasis and that it follows from the winds that stir.

Then those which glide gently… follows on from above and is an oath sworn by the ships that sail gently through the seas.

Then those who dispense a command… again follows from the above; this is an oath upon the angels who act in accordance with the divine command and dispense according to their different stations.

The divine command of the Lord of the Throne to create and govern is a single command, but insofar as each group of angels enacts it according to their own functions, the command branches out and is dispensed in as

many forms as there are functions of angels. Then when another group receives it, it is further subdivided according to their functions, until it reaches those angels who are proximal to particular cosmic phenomena. So the command is subdivided and multiplied according to the number and function of angels.

These four verses, as you can see, speak about divine governance in general, in that they give one example of what the command governs on land—namely the winds that scatter—and one example of what it governs by sea—the ships sailing gently—and another example of what it governs in the air—the rain-clouds bearing water. But then all of these are united by the angels who are the intermediaries of this governance—it is they who dispense a command.

In other words, these verses mean: "I swear by all of the causes which govern this world that such-and-such is the case…" and it is narrated by both the elect and the masses that [Imām] ʿAlī has interpreted these verses in the fashion we have just described.

Fakhr al-Rāzī says in *Tafsīr al-Kabīr* that the most appropriate reading of the verses is to see them as being connected with the winds; for just as the winds stir up the dust, they also carry the rain-laden clouds, propel the ships that glide gently upon the seas, and distribute the clouds around the world. However, in truth what he considers likely is far-fetched, as what we have mentioned above is more eloquent than what he has suggested.

إِنَّمَا تُوعَدُونَ لَصَادِقٌ ۝٥ وَإِنَّ الدِّينَ لَوَاقِعٌ ۝٦

(51:5–6) *…indeed what you are promised is truthful* (ṣādiq) *and indeed the retribution will surely come to pass!*

In the Arabic, *what* (mā) in *what you are promised* is a relative noun which refers to an implicit phrase, namely "that which you have been promised." Alternatively it could be infinitive (*maṣdariyyah*).

Indeed the retribution will surely come to pass is general and encompasses all forms of recompense. Some have said it encompasses all forms of warnings—a reading supported by the verse: *So admonish by the Qur'an him who fears My threat* (50:45).

A promise being "truthful" (*ṣādiq*) is a figure of speech in the same way that *a contented life* (69:21) is, in that the quality of the one making the promise (or living the life, namely being truthful or contented) is attributed to the promise (or the life) itself rather than the subject. And

the *retribution* (dīn) means the recompense (*jazāʾ*).

In any case, *indeed what you are promised is truthful* is the object of the oath pronounced in the above verses; *and indeed the retribution will surely come to pass* is semantically connected to it and serves as an explanation (*tafsīr*) of its meaning. In other words: "I swear by such-and-such that what you have been promised—by the Qur'an or the Prophet—regarding the Day of Resurrection and that God will recompense you for your deeds, good for good and evil for evil, is truthful, and indeed the recompense will come to pass!"

وَالسَّمَاءِ ذَاتِ الْحُبُكِ ﴿٧﴾

(51:7) *By the heavens full of adornment* (ḥubuk)…

Ḥubuk means either (1) embellishment or beauty; (2) skilful creation; or (3), as plural of *ḥubaykah* or *ḥubbāk*, meaning a "trail" (*ṭarīqah*) like that which appears on water if it is disturbed by the wind passing over it.

So if *ḥubuk* here is used in the first sense, it means: "I swear by the heavens with their beauty and embellishment." This is like the verse: *Indeed We have adorned the lowest heaven with the finery of the stars* (37:6). In the second sense, it means: "I swear by the heavens with their skilful creation." This is like the verse: *We have built the sky with might* (51:47). In the third sense, it means: "I swear by the heavens with their many trails." This is like the verse: *Certainly We created above you the seven tiers (*ṭarāʾiq*)* (23:17).

It appears that the third meaning is the most apposite for the object of this oath, which is the disagreement of people and the divergent paths they take. This is just as the previous series of oaths beginning *By the stirrers who stir*…, which shared meanings of movement and travel, were appropriate for their object *indeed what you are promised*..., which referred to journeying towards God and returning to Him.

إِنَّكُمْ لَفِي قَوْلٍ مُخْتَلِفٍ ﴿٨﴾ يُؤْفَكُ عَنْهُ مَنْ أُفِكَ ﴿٩﴾

(51:8–9) *…indeed you are of different opinions* (qawl mukhtalif)*!*
He is turned away from it who has been turned away.

Qawl mukhtalif means that which is contradictory or opposing. As the present discussion is focused on the truthfulness of the promises made by the Qur'an, the prophetic mission or the Prophet himself with regards to the Resurrection and the Recompense, then the most appropriate meaning

for *qawl mukhtalif* given the context is that their opinions differ about the matter of the Qur'an when they try to deny it. So sometimes they say: "It is magic and the one who brought it is a magician!" Other times, they say: "It is nonsense and the one who brought it is a madman!" And still other times, they say: "He is a soothsayer who receives it from devils and jinn." While at times they say: "It is poetry and the one who brought it is poetry!" And at others: "These are legends of the ancients he has written!"

He is turned away from it who has been turned away—*it* refers to the Book, insofar as it contains the promise of the Resurrection and Recompense. In other words: "Whoever has turned away from the Qur'an has been turned away." It is said that *it* refers to the Prophet and it means: "Whoever turns away from believing in him has been turned away." However, it is clear that the first reading is more faithful to the context, even if the upshot of both readings is effectively the same.

It has been related from some commentators that the pronoun *from it* refers to what they have been promised or the religion. God first swears by the winds etc. that the Resurrection and Recompense are true, then He swears by the heavens that they are of different opinions—so some of them are sceptical while others disbelieve wilfully—and then says: "Whoever turns away from believing in the Resurrection and Recompense has been turned away." This meaning is similar to the previous one.

Other commentators have suggested that the pronoun *it* refers to the different opinions and *from* (ʿan) is explanatory, as we see in the verse *We are not going to abandon our gods for (ʿan) what you say* (11:53). In this case this sentence is an adjective for *opinion* (qawl), and this renders the meaning: "You are in different opinions which turn away those who turn away." And this is also a viable interpretation.

It is said that the pronoun *you* (kum) in *you are of different opinions* refers to both Muslims and disbelievers and *different opinions* means that the Muslims believe that the Resurrection and Recompense will take place while the disbelievers think it will not. However, the context does not appear to support such a reading. Still other interpretations have been offered, but these are incongruous and not worth repeating.

قُتِلَ الْخَرَّاصُونَ ﴿١٠﴾ الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي غَمْرَةٍ سَاهُونَ ﴿١١﴾ يَسْأَلُونَ أَيَّانَ يَوْمُ الدِّينِ ﴿١٢﴾

(51:10–12) ***Perish the liars*** **(kharrāṣūn)**, ***who are heedless in a***

stupor! They ask, "When will be the Day of Retribution?"

Kharṣ originally means to speak on supposition and conjecture without knowledge, and because speaking without knowledge is very close to a lie, one who lies is called *kharrāṣ*. However, it is most likely that *kharrāṣūn* here refers to those who speak without knowledge rather than liars because they are delving into the matter of the Resurrection and Recompense to deny it but without having any knowledge.

Perish the liars is an invocation against them which asks they be denied success, which is the meaning relied upon by those who interpret this as a curse (*laʿn*).

Who are heedless in a stupor* (ghamrah)*!—According to al-Rāghib, *ghamrah* means a body of water which completely covers its location, and it became a figure of speech for ignorance which covers its bearer. And commentators have said heedless (*sahw*) here means any kind of unawareness (*ghaflah*).

So this verse describes the *kharrāṣūn*: they are drowning in ignorance and completely unaware of the reality of which they have been informed.

They ask, "When will be the Day of Retribution?" *They* are the *kharrāṣūn* and they ask this derisively, asking that it be hastened, as when they say: *And they say, "When will this promise be fulfilled, should you be truthful?"* (36:48)

Through this question they demand to know at what future time the Day of Retribution will occur—signified by their use of the interrogative particle *ayyān* ("when")—but this is only because the Day of Retribution is something that has been promised (*mawʿūd*), and this means it falls under the rubric of temporal events (*zamāniyyāt*). They ask about this event like they would any other, using interrogatives like "when?" (*ayyān* or *matā*), in the same way you might ask: "When is the day of Eid?" because Eid also falls under the rubric of temporal events.

It could also represent an expansion of the notion of temporality such that the particular qualities of the time are treated as an extension of it. In this case, asking about the time of a time is equivalent to when it occurs in relation to other times; is it before or after a certain amount of time? For example, when we ask: "When is the day of Eid?" we might answer: "in ten days' time" or "before Sunday." This is an expansion that is common in everyday speech (*ʿurf*), and the Qur'an contains many instances of it.

يَوْمَ هُمْ عَلَى النَّارِ يُفْتَنُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

(51:13) ***It is the day when they will be tormented in the Fire***

They are the liars mentioned in the previous verse. The original meaning of *torment* (fatan) is to put gold into fire to test its quality; from there it came to be used for all forms of burning and punishment.

This verse is in response to their question, but instead of telling them the time of the Day of Retribution, it gives a description of their condition on that day, as its time belongs to the Unseen and is known only to God: *They question you concerning the Hour, when will it set in? Say, "Its knowledge is only with my Lord: none except Him shall manifest it at its time"* (7:187).

The meaning of the verse is: "The Day of Retribution will come to pass on the day the liars are punished in the Fire."

ذُوقُوا فِتْنَتَكُمْ هَذَا الَّذِي كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تَسْتَعْجِلُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

(51:14) ***"Taste your torment. This is what you used to hasten."***

This relates what God will say to the liars, or what the angels will say by His command, while they are being punished in the Fire on that day.

In other words, they will be told: "Taste your own personal punishment. This is the punishment that you were hastening when you asked in derision: 'When is the Day of Retribution?'"

إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَعُيُونٍ ﴿١٥﴾

(51:15) ***Indeed the Godwary will be in gardens and springs***

Now God turns to describe the condition of the Godwary in contrast to that of the liars. *Gardens and springs* are indefinite (*nakirah*) to hint at their magnificence—as if they are so wondrous that human language could not describe them. And *springs* is joined to *gardens* as an extension of the latter's locale, meaning that the gardens will contain springs rather than the Godwary actually being in them.

آخِذِينَ مَا آتَاهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا قَبْلَ ذَٰلِكَ مُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٦﴾

(51:16) ***receiving what their Lord has given them, for they had***

been virtuous aforetime.

Meaning they will accept the gifts of their Lord's kindness and be pleased with Him and with what He gives them, as suggested by the use of the words give (*ītāʾ*) and "receive" (*akhdh*) and the fact that the act of "giving" is attributed directly to their Lord.

For they had been virtuous aforetime is an explanation (*taʿlīl*) of the above details. In other words: They are in this condition because before that—in this world—they were virtuous in their actions, meaning they did good deeds.

كَانُوا قَلِيلًا مِنَ اللَّيْلِ مَا يَهْجَعُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

(51:17) *They used* (kānū) *to sleep* (mā yahjaʿūn) *a little* (qalīlan) *of the night* (min al-layl)….

These verses are an exposition (*tafsīr*) of their virtuousness; *hujūʿ* means to nap or to slumber for a short time.

There are several ways of reading this verse based on how we read *mā* in *mā yahjaʿūn*. It could be a superfluous *mā*, in which case the verb *yahjaʿūn* is the predicate of *kānū*, in which case *qalīlan* is an adverb associated with it, meaning: "In a little amount of time."

Alternatively *qalīlan* in this reading might be the adjective of an absolute object (*mafʿūl muṭlaq*), meaning "a little sleep", to which *min al-layl* is connected, rendering the meaning: "They would sleep in a little amount of time during the night" or "they would sleep a little during the night."

Mā could also be read as a relative noun (*ism mawṣūl*) referring to an implicit pronoun while *qalīlan* is the predicate of *kānū*, with *mā* as its subject. This renders the meaning: "It was only a little of the night that they would sleep in."

Finally, *mā* could be infinitive (*maṣdariyyah*) whose verbal noun is formed from it, in which case it becomes the subject of *qalīlan* which is the predicate of *kānū*.

In any case, *a little of the night* can be understood in comparison to the total time of each night, meaning they sleep a little of each night and spend most of it in prayer. Or it can be understood in relation to the total number of nights in their lives (*the night* being taken as an abstract category in this case), indicating that they would only sleep on a few nights and get up for prayer on most of them. In other words, they would not

miss night prayers (*ṣalāt al-layl*), except on a few nights.

وَبِالْأَسْحَارِ هُمْ يَسْتَغْفِرُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

(15:18) *…and at dawns they would plead for forgiveness.…*

Meaning they would ask God to forgive them for their sins. It has been suggested that pleading forgiveness means prayer, but this is clearly weak.

وَفِي أَمْوَالِهِمْ حَقٌّ لِلسَّائِلِ وَالْمَحْرُومِ ﴿١٩﴾

(15:19) *…and there was a share in their wealth for the beggar and the deprived.*

The previous two verses (15:17–18) described their behavior towards God, namely that they would rise for prayers at night and plead for forgiveness in the mornings. Meanwhile this verse describes their behavior with other people, giving money to the beggar and the needy.

Saying that there was a share (*ḥaqq*) specifically for the beggar and the deprived in their wealth—while if there was such a share it would be in everyone's wealth—shows that because of their pure souls, they think it is right for the beggar and the deprived to have some of their wealth, so they behave in this way purely for the sake of spreading mercy and goodness.

A beggar (*sāʾil*) is someone who asks for a donation by showing his poverty, while the deprived is someone who cannot find provision or is unsuccessful in attaining it but does not ask for help out of embarrassment.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, the author relates that his father narrated to him, from Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, from Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq]: Ibn al-Kuwā asked the Commander of the Faithful about the verse: *By the stirrers who stir* (51:1). He said: "The wind."
And about the verse: *then the bearers of burdens* (51:2). He said: "They are the clouds."
And about the verse: *then those which glide gently* (51:3). He said: "They are boats."
And about the verse: *then those who dispense a command* (51:4). He said: "Angels."

Author's comments: This tradition has been narrated in Sunni sources as well, as we see in *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*.

(2) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is narrated by ʿAbd al-Razzāq, Fāryābī, Saʿīd b. Manṣūr, Ḥārith b. Abī Usāmah, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn al-Anbārī in his *Masāḥif*, al-Ḥākim—who declared it authentic—and al-Bayhaqī in *Shuʿub al-Īmān*, through various routes from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib:
[He was asked] about the verse *By the stirrers who stir*. He said: "The wind."
And about the verse: *then the bearers of burdens*. He said: "Clouds."
And about the verse: *then those which glide gently*. He said: "Boats."
And about the verse: *then those who dispense a command* (51:4). He said: "Angels."

(3) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, Abū Jaʿfar and Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Bāqir and Imām al-Ṣādiq] are narrated to say:
None may swear an oath except by God, but God may swear by whatever He wishes of His creation.

(4) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is narrated by Ibn Manīʿ from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib that he was asked about the verse *By the heavens full of adornment* (51:7). He said: "Endowed with a beautiful creation."

Author's comments: A similar report appears in *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*. It reads: "It is said: 'Endowed with beauty and ornamentation.'"

(5) And another appears in *Jawāmiʿ al-Jāmīʿ*. It reads:
From ʿAlī: "Their beauty and their ornamentation."
Some reports about the verse …*indeed you are of different opinions! He is turned away from it who has been turned away* (51:8–9) say that this refers to *wilāyah*.

(6) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* about the verse, *they used to sleep a little of the night* (51:17):
It is said to mean they would pray as soon as a little of the night had passed. And this is narrated from Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq].

(7) And in the same source, about the verse *and at dawns they would plead for forgiveness* (51:18):
Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq] says: "They would ask forgiveness from God seventy times during their *witr* just before dawn."

(8) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is narrated by Ibn Mardawayh from Anas:
God's Messenger said: "Spending the last part of the night in night prayers (*tahajjud*) is dearer to me than the first part of it

because God says: *and at dawns they would plead for forgiveness*."

(9) In the same source, it is narrated by Ibn Mardawayh from Ibn ʿUmar from the Prophet about the verse *and at dawns they would plead for forgiveness*, that he said:
Meaning they offer prayers.

Author's comments: Perhaps the reason why some say that "pleading forgiveness" (*istighfār*) means prayer is because *ṣalāt al-witr* includes a component of pleading forgiveness, just as when the word *qurʾān* is used to refer to prayer in the verse *…and the dawn recital. Indeed the dawn recital is attended* (17:78).

(10) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī* about the verse *and there was a share in their wealth for the beggar and the deprived* (51:19), he says:
The beggar is one who asks, while the deprived is the one who cannot work.

(11) In *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām* from Ṣafwān al-Jamāl from Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq], it is narrated about this verse:
The deprived (*maḥrūm*) is someone gainfully employed but who has not profited from buying and selling.

(12) In another narration from Abū Jaʿfar and Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Bāqir and Imām al-Ṣādiq]:
The deprived is someone whose mind is without deficiency but who's provision is insufficient even though he is gainfully employed.

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Verses 20–51

These verses highlight a number of God's signs that demonstrate that He alone has lordship (*rubūbiyyah*) over creation, and the governance of the heavens and the earth, mankind and their sustenance ultimately return to Him. The logical consequence of this is that He not only *can* send down His religion through messengers but He *must*. Another consequence of this is that people must believe in the content of the preaching of these messengers, especially their promises of a resurrection and recompense, for what they promise is true and the Recompense will surely come to pass. And we have already mentioned in the previous section the particular approach this sūrah adopts in its argumentation.

وَفِي الْأَرْضِ آيَاتٌ لِّلْمُوقِنِينَ ﴿٢٠﴾

(51:20) ***In the earth are signs for those who have conviction***

The conclusion that will be drawn from these verses is *So flee toward God… Do not set up another god besides God…* (51:50–51). This demonstrates that the arguments in these verses should be read as arguments for God alone having lordship, not arguments for His existence or the fact that all creation will return to Him, etc.

This verse alludes to the astounding signs the earth contains that indicate that it follows a single order and therefore has a single organiser. This is the case whether we look to the land, sea, mountains, hills, springs, rivers, and minerals, and their benefits, all of which are in harmony with one another and from which benefits everything that dwells within them, whether animal or vegetable. All of this is within a single system whose continued existence is neither the result of chance or accident. On the contrary, it points to it being the product of power, knowledge and wisdom and that therefore it is the product of a wise, knowing and powerful creator and governor.

So wherever you look, whichever way you turn, whatever angle you adopt, the universal order that permeates this existence is a clear sign and obvious proof for the oneness of its Lord, who is without partner. This the plain truth for the people of certainty; therefore, it contains signs for

those have conviction.

وَفِي أَنفُسِكُمْ ۚ أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

(51:21) ***And in your selves. Will you not then perceive?***

And in your selves is connected with the previous verse *in the earth*.... In other words: And in your souls are manifest signs as well for those who perceive them and examine them deeply. Will you not then perceive?

The signs contained in the people's own selves include the composition of their bodies and limbs; their cells and the miraculous functions they perform; the fact that their bodies are united in action even though they are made up of so many parts, showing that this is all governed by a single entity; as well as the different stages of life these bodies go through—as a foetus, a child, a teenager, a youth and an adult.

Another sign is the way in which souls or spirits become attached to the body, like senses become attached to sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch, which are the primary ways in which a person's soul becomes aware of the outside world and thereby able to distinguish good from bad and beneficial from harmful. In this way, the soul can pursue that which contains its entelechy and flee from that which does not accord with its nature. Each of these senses are governed by a system separate from that of all other senses; sight does not know what sound knows or what is going on in it, and so on. But despite this separation between the senses, all of the information they yield is gathered together and placed at the disposal of a single agent—the soul who controls the body. And God encompasses all of them.

The same applies to all of the faculties found in the human being, whether his anger or desire and everything that results from these. Each one of these faculties is different, with its own functions and system, yet they all fall under the governance of a single agent, which yokes them together and places them at its own disposal.

The system that organizes all of these phenomena came into existence at the same time as them; it had no choice or hand in their creation, so the system that organizes these phenomena, like the phenomena themselves, is the product of a Maker.

Included also are spiritual signs that dwell in the realm of souls which are visible to those who look for them; God has placed signs therein which are beyond our ability to describe, but which open the door of certainty for

the one who comes upon them and admit him to the circle of those with conviction, for such a person has seen the dominions of the heavens and the earth, as God says: *Thus did We show Abraham the dominions of the heavens and the earth, that he might be of those who possess certitude* (6:75).

وَفِي السَّمَاءِ رِزْقُكُمْ وَمَا تُوعَدُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

(51:22) *And in the heavens is your provision and what you are promised.*

It is said that *heavens* (samāʾ) means the sky—as *samāʾ* literally means whatever is above someone—and *provision* refers to the rain which God sends down upon the earth and causes all manner of plants used for food, clothing and other benefits to appear. God says: *and what God sends down from the heavens of provision with which He revives the earth after its death* (45:5). The rain is called *provision* as it is the cause of their provision.

It is also said that this refers to the causes of their provision in the heavens: the Sun, Moon and planets, their shifting points of rising and setting which mark the seasons, and the succession of night and day, all of which are causes for mankind's provision. In other words God means "the means for your provision." It could be argued as well that the existence of these causes suffices for the existence of their effects.

Others have said that their provision being in the heavens means that it has been decreed in the heavens as each and every being's provision is recorded upon the Guarded Tablet.

It is also possible that this refers to the Unseen World in general. All things, including people's provision, descend from God. About specific things, He has said: *and He has sent down for you eight mates of the cattle* (39:6), and: *We sent down iron, in which there is great might* (57:25); also in a general sense, He has said: *There is not a thing but that its sources are with Us, and We do not send it down except in a known measure* (15:21). The meaning of "provision" (*rizq*) is anything that the human being sustains his existence with, whether food, drink, clothing or shelter; a spouse, a child, knowledge, strength, etc.

…and what you are promised is connected to *provision* which appears to refer to Paradise, as God says elsewhere: *near which is the Garden of the Abode* (53:15). Some have said it means paradise and hell, or divine reward and punishment, but this does not accord with the verse: *those who deny Our signs and are disdainful of them—the gates of the heaven will*

not be opened for them, nor shall they enter paradise until the camel passes through the needle's eye (7:40). However, the Qur'an does describe divine punishment as descending through the heavens, as when God says: *So We sent down on those who were wrongdoers a plague from the sky* (2:59) and in other verses.

Some have suggested that *and what you are promised* is actually the subject of a new sentence and its predicate is: *By the Lord of the sky and the earth, it is indeed the truth* (51:23). However this yields a very convoluted meaning.

فَوَرَبِّ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ إِنَّهُ لَحَقٌّ مِثْلَ مَا أَنَّكُمْ تَنْطِقُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

(51:23) *By the Lord of the heavens and the earth, it is indeed the truth, just as you speak.*

It refers to the content of the verse immediately before—*and in the heavens is your provision and what you are promised. It is indeed the truth* means that it is immutably fixed in the Divine Decree, rather than a secondary or accidental issue.

In other words, this means: "I swear by the Lord of the heavens and the earth that what we have said about your provision and the Paradise you have been promised (which is also a kind of provision (*rizq*), as God has said repeatedly: *For them shall be forgiveness and a noble provision* (8:74)) and other things being in the heavens is indeed fixed and decreed as surely as your speech, which is a fact no one doubts.

Some commentators entertain the possibility that *it* refers only to *what you are promised* or to *provision* but not both; or to God; to the Prophet; to the Qur'an; or to the Retribution mentioned in the verse: *and indeed the retribution will surely come to pass* (51:6); or to the Day of Retribution as in the verse: *When will be the Day of Retribution?* (51:12); or to everything that has been said from the beginning of the sūrah until now. However, I believe the most apposite reading is that it refers to the verse immediately above: *and in the heavens is your provision and what you are promised.*

A Discussion on the Relationship Between Provision and its Recipient

"Provision" (*rizq*) means that by which a person sustains themselves, or which adds something to his survival by becoming a part of him or attached to him in any sense. This could be as food, which extends a

person's life and helps him to survive by becoming a part of his body, or a spouse who satisfies his partner's desires and provides offspring to her, or anything else of this sort.

So this includes material entities which sustain one another, such as the human being who sustains himself from plants and animals. So this means anything that facilitates the survival of the recipient (*marzūq*) through the different stages and conditions of his physical existence. These provisions are themselves different stages of physical existence assigned to him but they are also different stages of physical existence included in the provision that is assigned to him, even if we call them by different names. So, just as by eating food, the human being acquires new mass in his body, so too does his food become new mass in his body.

This also includes the divine decree that encompasses the cosmos permeates the individual entities that constitute it and determines what each thing becomes in and of itself and the different stages of its existence. In other words, it is the chain of cause and effect, insofar as it represents a complete system made up of sufficient causes and necessary effects.

From the above, it becomes clear that sustenance and its recipient are inseparably bound to one another. It is impossible for any being to reach a new stage of its being by absorbing or becoming attached to another thing without the existence of this other thing which it has absorbed or become attached to, and which shares in its new level of existence. It is senseless to speak of a recipient of provision (*marzūq*) who continues to exist without any provision (*rizq*). It is equally senseless to speak of provision (*rizq*) without a recipient thereof. Furthermore, it is senseless to speak of an excess of provision over and above what the recipient needs. The same applies to the survival (*baqāʾ*) of the recipient without provision, as provision falls within the purview of the divine decree (*qaḍāʾ ilāhī*) in a primary sense, not by accident (*bi al-ʿaraḍ*) or as a result or something else (*bi al-tabaʿ*). That is what is meant when we say that provision is the truth (*ḥaqq*).

Commentary continues:

هَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ ضَيْفِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ الْمُكْرَمِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾

(51:24) ***Did you receive the story of Abraham's honoured guests* (ḍayfi ibrāhīm al-mukramīn)*?***

This refers to the story of the angels visiting Abraham and giving good

news to him and his wife and then their destruction of Lot's people, and this story contains a sign of God's sole lordship, as we have mentioned above.

Did you receive the story…? magnifies the importance of the story; *mukramīn* ("honoured"—referring to the angels who visited) is an adjective for *ḍayf*. *Ḍayf* appears in the singular here because it is originally a verbal noun (*maṣdar*) which does not accept the dual or plural forms.

إِذْ دَخَلُوا عَلَيْهِ فَقَالُوا سَلَامًا ۖ قَالَ سَلَامٌ قَوْمٌ مُنْكَرُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

(51:25) ***When they entered into his presence, they said, "Peace!" "Peace!" He answered, "An unfamiliar folk."***

When (idh) is adverbial and connected to *story* (ḥadīth) in the above verse. "*Peace!*" (salāman) is the utterance of the verb *they said*. It is accusative (*manṣūb*) because it is attached to an implicit verb as an absolute object: "We give you greetings of peace" (*nusallim ʿalayk salāman*).

"*Peace!" He answered…* is a subject of a new sentence whose predicate is implicit, meaning: "*Peace be upon you!*" (salāmun ʿalaykum). His response is actually superior to their greeting because when he says *salāmun*, this is a nominal sentence—as shown by its being in the nominative case (*marfūʿ*)—which signifies its content (namely, peace) has already been established in reality. Meanwhile, their greeting *salāman* is a verbal sentence—as shown by its being in the accusative case (*manṣūb*)—which signifies a continuous tense, meaning that its content (peace) has yet to be established.

An unfamiliar folk (qawmun munkarūn)—it appears from the story that these are the words of Abraham to himself, meaning that when he saw them he did not recognise them and said to himself that these are an unfamiliar people. This does not contradict the verse *But when he saw their hands not reaching for it, he took them amiss* (11:70) in that it also mentions him feeling unfamiliarity ("took them amiss"—*nakirahum*) after he offered them a roasted calf, as what is mentioned here is Abraham's internal monologue while what is mentioned in 11:70 is the visible appearance of this feeling upon his face. This is a more appropriate reading than that of a group of commentators who have said that this is something he said to them, namely: "You are *an unfamiliar folk*!"

فَرَاغَ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِ فَجَاءَ بِعِجْلٍ سَمِينٍ ﴿٢٦﴾

(51:26) ***Then he retired to his family and brought a fat calf***

To retire (iḥtiyāl) means to go stealthily. According to al-Rāghib: "It means to go to something in secret." And the first meaning devolves to the second.

A fat calf means a fat roasted calf, as indicated by the words *and put it near them* (fa qarrabahu ilayhim) (51:27), or the *fa* could be meant to introduce a time lapse, meaning: "So he brought a fat calf, slaughtered it, roasted it and put it near them."

فَقَرَّبَهُ إِلَيْهِمْ قَالَ أَلَا تَأْكُلُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

(51:27) ***and put it near them. He said, "Will you not eat?"—The angels do not eat the food, but Abraham thinks them human beings.***

فَأَوْجَسَ مِنْهُمْ خِيفَةً ۖ قَالُوا لَا تَخَفْ ۖ وَبَشَّرُوهُ بِغُلَامٍ عَلِيمٍ ﴿٢٨﴾

(51:28) ***Then he felt a fear of them (fa awjasa minhum khīfa). They said, "Do not be afraid!" and they gave him the good news of a wise son.***

Then (fa) introduces a lapse, with the meaning: "They did not reach for the food, and when he saw that he took them amiss and felt a fear of them. *Ījās* means to feel something in one's mind, and *khīfah* means a kind of fear, so the verse means that he felt a kind of fear from them.

They said, "Do not be afraid!" This sentence is introduced abruptly without using a conjunction (such as "and" or "so") because it is the answer to an implied question from the audience; it is as if someone said: "So what happened after he felt this fear from them?" And the answer came: *They said, "Do not be afraid!" and they gave him the good news of a wise son*. And in doing so they turned his fear to relief and happiness. The meaning of *a wise son* is either Ishmael or Isaac, and we have already discussed the disagreement about this point.

فَأَقْبَلَتِ امْرَأَتُهُ فِي صَرَّةٍ فَصَكَّتْ وَجْهَهَا وَقَالَتْ عَجُوزٌ عَقِيمٌ ﴿٢٩﴾

(51:29) ***Then his wife came forward crying*** **(fī ṣarratin)**. ***She beat her face*** **(ṣakkat wajhahā)**, ***and said, "A barren old woman!"***

According to *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*:

> "The word *ṣarrah* means to shriek and it originally meant the creaking of a door (*ṣarīr al-bāb*). A group can also be called a *ṣarrah*. Meanwhile, *ṣakkah* means to beat severely with intent."

This renders the meaning: "When Abraham's wife heard the good news, she came forward shrieking, beat her face and said: 'I am a barren old woman! How shall I bear a child?'" Or her words could mean: "Does a barren old woman give birth to a son?"

It is said that *ṣarrah* here means "group" (*jamāʿah*); namely, that she came to them in a group, struck her face and uttered these words. However, the first meaning is in greater accord with the context and tone of the verses.

قَالُوا كَذَٰلِكِ قَالَ رَبُّكِ ۖ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْحَكِيمُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٣٠﴾

(51:30) ***They said, "So has your Lord said. Indeed He is the All-wise, the All-knowing."***

So (kadhālik) refers to the good news they brought to her and her husband while they were both advanced in years; she was old and barren and her husband elderly. However, their Lord is all-wise (*ḥakīm*) and only desires things according to His wisdom, and He is all-knowing (*ʿalīm*), to whom nothing about the affair is hidden.

قَالَ فَمَا خَطْبُكُمْ أَيُّهَا الْمُرْسَلُونَ ﴿٣١﴾ قَالُوا إِنَّا أُرْسِلْنَا إِلَىٰ قَوْمٍ مُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾
لِنُرْسِلَ عَلَيْهِمْ حِجَارَةً مِنْ طِينٍ ﴿٣٣﴾ مُسَوَّمَةً عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ لِلْمُسْرِفِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾

(51:31–34) ***He said, "O messengers, what is now your errand?" They said, "We have been sent toward a guilty people, that We may rain upon them stones of clay, marked with your Lord for the profligate."***

An "errand" (*khaṭb*) is a matter of great importance; "stones of clay" (*ḥijārah min al-ṭīn*) is petrified clay; "to mark something" (*taswīm*) means that it has been given a sign.

This means: "Abraham said: 'O messenger angels, what is the mission you have been given?' The angels told Abraham: 'We have been sent toward a guilty people…'—the people of Lot—'that We may rain upon them stones of petrified clay, which God calls *sijīl*, marked by your Lord

specifically to bring destruction upon the profligate.'" And it appears that *the profligate* (al-musrifīn) is mentioned with the definite article to show it is referring to a specific aforementioned group of them.

فَأَخْرَجْنَا مَنْ كَانَ فِيهَا مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٣٥﴾ فَمَا وَجَدْنَا فِيهَا غَيْرَ بَيْتٍ مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ ﴿٣٦﴾ وَتَرَكْنَا فِيهَا آيَةً لِلَّذِينَ يَخَافُونَ الْعَذَابَ الْأَلِيمَ ﴿٣٧﴾

(51:35–37) ***So We picked out those who were in it of the faithful, but We did not find there other than one house of muslims, and We have left therein a sign for those who fear a painful punishment.***

So (fa) signifies a time lapse, indicating that part of the angels' story has been omitted; namely their going to Lot and visiting him in his house; Lot's people demanding that the angels be sent out to them; and their saving Lot and his family from the town. However this story has been given in detail elsewhere in the Qur'an.

So we picked out… indicates that they destroyed the town, as their bring out Lot and his family was a prelude to this; *…who were in it* clearly means "in the town" based on the context of the verse; *one house of muslims* refers to the house of Lot. *We have left therein a sign…* again alludes to the destruction of the town and making the highest point of their land the lowest. By *left* (taraknā), the angels allude to the fact that they have made something lasting (*ibqā*ʾ), and these particulars have been explained elsewhere in the Qur'an also.

In short, the meaning of this verse is: "When the angels went to Lot and events transpired as they did, God picked out the faithful of the town, but He did not find more than a single house of *muslim*s, who were Lot and his family. By overturning the land completely and destroying its people, God has left a sign that demonstrates His Lordship and the falsehood of polytheism for those people who fear a painful punishment."

وَفِي مُوسَىٰ إِذْ أَرْسَلْنَاهُ إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ بِسُلْطَانٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٣٨﴾

(51:38) ***And in Moses when We sent him to Pharaoh with a manifest authority*** **(ṣulṭān mubīn).**

This is connected to *We have left therein a sign*, meaning that in Moses also is a sign; *manifest authority* (ṣulṭān mubīn) refers to the awe-inspiring proofs and miracles that Moses brought with him.

فَتَوَلَّىٰ بِرُكْنِهِ وَقَالَ سَاحِرٌ أَوْ مَجْنُونٌ ﴿٣٩﴾

(51:39) ***But he turned away with his support* (bi ruknihi), *and said, "A magician or a madman!"***

Support (rukn) means his armies, as suggested by the following verse. Assuming that *bi* signifies accompaniment (*muṣāḥabah*), this verse says: "But he turned away with his armies." However, it has also been suggested that the *bi* is for transitivity (*taʿdiyah*), in which case the verse means: "But he turned his support away."

…and said, "A magician or a madman!" In other words, sometimes he said that Moses was mad, as in the verse: *Indeed your messenger, who has been sent to you, is surely crazy!* (26:27) and at others he accused him of being a sorcerer, as in the verse: "*This is indeed an expert magician*" (26:34).

فَأَخَذْنَاهُ وَجُنُودَهُ فَنَبَذْنَاهُمْ فِي الْيَمِّ وَهُوَ مُلِيمٌ ﴿٤٠﴾

***(51:40) So We seized him and his hosts, and cast them into the sea, while he was blameworthy* (mulīm).**

"To cast something" (*nabdh*) means to throw it away without importance. *Mulīm* means someone who does something worthy of blame; it is conjugated from the verb *alāma* which means to do something worthy of blame, in the same sense as the verb *aghraba*—which shares its pattern of conjugation—refers to one who does something strange.

The verse means: "So We seized him and his armies who were his support, and We cast them into the sea because he had demonstrated blameworthy disbelief, obstinacy and recalcitrance." Pharaoh is singled out as "blameworthy" (*mulīm*) even though all of those with him share his fate because he is their leader who led them into perdition. God says: *On the Day of Resurrection he will lead his people and conduct them into the Fire: an evil goal for the incoming!* (11:98). And this verse alludes to the awesome power and terrifying violence at God's disposal, since the fate of Pharaoh and his host is well known!

وَفِي عَادٍ إِذْ أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمُ الرِّيحَ الْعَقِيمَ ﴿٤١﴾

(51:41) And in ʿĀd when We unleashed upon them a barren wind,

This is also connected to the above verse. In other words: "And in ʿĀd

there is a sign when we unleashed upon them a barren wind…."

It has been suggested that a barren wind is a wind that does not bring any of the usual benefits associated with the winds, such as bringing forth clouds, pollinating trees, spreading foodstuffs, benefiting animals or cleansing the air. Its only effect is to bring destruction, as the verse below suggests.

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مَا تَذَرُ مِنْ شَيْءٍ أَتَتْ عَلَيْهِ إِلَّا جَعَلَتْهُ كَالرَّمِيمِ ﴿٤٢﴾

(51:42) ***It left nothing that it came upon without making it like decayed bones.***

The meaning of this verse is clear.

وَفِي ثَمُودَ إِذْ قِيلَ لَهُمْ تَمَتَّعُوا حَتَّىٰ حِينٍ ﴿٤٣﴾

(51:43) ***And in Thamūd, when they were told, "Enjoy for a while."***

This again is connected to "sign", meaning: "And in Thamūd there is a sign when they were told: 'Enjoy for a while.'" It is their prophet, Ṣāliḥ who tells them this, as we see in the verse: *"Enjoy yourselves in your homes for three days: that is a promise not to be belied!"* (11:65) He told them this when they hamstrung the she-camel, whereupon he gave them three days to repent for their faithlessness and insolence towards God, but this did not benefit them in the least and the word of punishment became due against them.

فَعَتَوْا عَنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّهِمْ فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ الصَّاعِقَةُ وَهُمْ يَنْظُرُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

(51:44) ***Then they defied the command of their Lord; so the thunderbolt seized them as they looked on.***

According to Rāghib, to "defy" (*ʿatw*) means to shrink from obedience and therefore it carries a similar meaning to insolence. The defiance mentioned in this verse is when they defied God's command and then refused to repent to Him during the three days they were given. Therefore one cannot object that their defiance of God's command came before their "enjoyment"—as the full story says elsewhere—while this verse suggests the opposite.

So the thunderbolt seized them as they looked on: This does not contradict what we read elsewhere, where the word "cry" (*ṣayḥah*) is used in

place of "thunderbolt" (*ṣāʿiqah*) as in the verse: *The Cry seized those who were wrongdoers* (11:67). The reason for this is that it is possible for them to be punished by both a thunderbolt and a cry together!

فَمَا اسْتَطَاعُوا مِنْ قِيَامٍ وَمَا كَانُوا مُنْتَصِرِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾

(51:45) ***So they were neither able to rise up, nor were they helped.***

In other words they could not get up from where they were sitting to flee from God's punishment, referring to the fact that they didn't have enough warning to rise from sitting before the punishment overtook them.

Nor to come to one another's aid is connected to *able to*. In other words: "And they could not be helped by anyone else to repel the punishment from themselves." In short, the two sentences of this verse mean that they could not prevent the punishment from overtaking them whether by themselves or with the help of someone else.

وَقَوْمَ نُوحٍ مِنْ قَبْلُ ۖ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا قَوْمًا فَاسِقِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

(51:46) ***And the people of Noah aforetime. Indeed they were a transgressing lot.***

This is connected to the previous accounts. *The people of Noah* is accusative (*manṣūb*) in the Arabic because it is the object of an implicit verb with the meaning: "And we destroyed the people of Noah before ʿĀd and Thamūd. Indeed they were a lot who transgressed God's commands."

In other words, there are commands and prohibitions which God has enjoined on mankind, namely that He is their Lord and the Lord of everything, and He has called them to the true religion upon the tongues of his messengers. So what the Prophets brought was truly from God, and one of the things they brought was the promise of resurrection and recompense in the Hereafter.

وَالسَّمَاءَ بَنَيْنَاهَا بِأَيْدٍ وَإِنَّا لَمُوسِعُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

(51:47) ***We have built the sky with might*** **(ayd)**, ***and indeed it is We who are its expanders.***

In this verse, we return to the previous discussion that began with the verse: *In the earth are signs for those who have conviction…* (51:20). *Ayd* means power or blessing and both meanings are applicable to *indeed it is*

We who are expanders.

If we take the first sense of *ayd*, this means: "We have built the sky with incalculable might and We abound in might—nothing can stop us." If we take the second sense of *ayd*, this means: "We have built the sky for the sake of incalculable blessings and We abound in wealth and blessings; Our treasure houses are never depleted by our generosity in giving provisions. We send down provision from the heavens to whomsoever We please and We expand this provision howsoever we please."

It is possible that *expanders* (mūsiʿūn) means someone who gives abundantly, in which case the meaning would be "We cause the heavens to expand", as some modern calculations suggest is the case.

وَالْأَرْضَ فَرَشْنَاهَا فَنِعْمَ الْمَاهِدُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

(51:48) ***And the earth We have spread it out*** **(farashnāhā)*****, so how excellent spreaders*** **(māhidūn)** ***We have been!***

Both *farash* and *mahd* mean to spread out (*basaṭ*). In other words, we have spread out and levelled the earth so that you may dwell and live upon it, so how excellent spreaders we have been. However, this idea of spreading out and levelling does not contradict the idea of the world being round.

وَمِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَا زَوْجَيْنِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

(51:49) ***In all things We have created pairs*** **(zawjayn)** ***so that you may take admonition.***

This refers to complementary opposites, whereby one completes the other: active and passive, male and female.

It has been suggested that this refers to all complementary opposites: male and female, heavens and earth, day and night, land and sea, humans and jinn.

It has also been suggested that this refers only to male and female.

…so that you may take admonition means that you may take a lesson that the Creator of these pairs is above having a partner or an opposite; He is absolutely unitary.

فَفِرُّوا إِلَى اللَّهِ ۖ إِنِّي لَكُمْ مِنْهُ نَذِيرٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿٥٠﴾ وَلَا تَجْعَلُوا مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَٰهًا آخَرَ ۖ إِنِّي لَكُمْ مِنْهُ نَذِيرٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿٥١﴾

(51:50–51) ***So flee toward God. Indeed I am a manifest warner to you from Him. Do not set up another god besides God. Indeed I am a manifest warner to you from Him.***

These two verses draw a conclusion from the above arguments for God's sole lordship and divinity, which contained accounts of various past nations who disbelieved in God and His messengers and ultimately were completely destroyed as a result of this.

So the meaning of *flee toward God* means to seek refuge in him from disbelief (*kufr*) and the punishment that results from it by believing in Him alone and taking Him as one's exclusive object of worship.

Do not set up another god besides God—this is like an explanation of *So flee toward God*. In other words: believing in Him means believing in Him alone without any partner in His divinity or worship.

And the words *Indeed I am a manifest warner to you* are repeated here to emphasize the warning, and these two verses both relate words uttered by the Prophet Himself.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī* about the verse: *and in your selves. Will you not then perceive?* (51:21), he says:

He created you seeing and hearing, sometimes pleased and at others angry, sometimes sated and at others hungry; these are all God's signs.

Author's comments: In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, this is attributed to Imām al-Ṣādiq.

(2) In *Tawḥīd*, it is narrated from Hishām b. Sālim:

Someone asked Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq]: "How did you know your Lord?"

He said: "Through the undoing of decisions and thwarting of ambition. I decided something but my decision was undone; I aspired to something but my ambition was thwarted."

Author's comments: In *Khiṣāl*, this is narrated from him from his forefathers from the Commander of the Faithful.

(3) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, al-Kharāʾiṭī narrates in his *Musāwī al-Akhlāq* from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib regarding *and in your selves. Will you not then perceive?*:

He said: "The route of urine and faeces."

Author's comments: This narration, like the two before it, sets out to expound some instances of the different ways of knowing God through one's self.

(4) And in the same source, Ibn al-Nuqūr and al-Daylamī narrate from ʿAlī from the Prophet about the verse: *And in the heavens is your provision and what you are promised* (51:22):
Rain.

Author's comments: A similar saying is narrated in *Tafsīr al-Qummī* with a discontinued (*mursal*) and implicit (*muḍmar*) chain.

(5) Mufīd narrates in his *Irshād* from ʿAlī:
Seek your provision, for it is guaranteed for its seeker!

(6) In *Tawḥīd* it is narrated from Abū al-Bakhtarī:
Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad [Imām al-Ṣādiq] narrated to me from his father, from his grandfather, from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, that the Prophet told him: "O ʿAlī! Certainty means that you please no one for God's wrath, that you praise no one for what God has given you, that you do not blame anyone for what God has not given you—for indeed provision cannot be hastened by anyone's greed or repelled by anyone's dislike."

(7) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, we read:
Then his wife came forward fī ṣarratin (51:29) means "in a group." This is narrated from al-Ṣādiq.

(8) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is narrated by Fāryābī and Ibn Mundhir from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib:
A barren wind means an ill-fated one.

(9) In *Tawḥīd*, it is narrated from Muḥammad b. Muslim:
I asked Abū Jaʿfar [Imām al-Bāqir] about the verse: "*O Iblis! What keeps you from prostrating before that which I have created with My two hands (*bi yadayya*)?*" (38:75)
He replied: "In the speech of the Arabs, a 'hand' (*yad*) refers to power and blessings. God says: *Remember Our servant, David, of strength (*dhā al-ayd*)* (38:17). In another verse, He says: *We have built the sky with might (*bi ayd*)* (51:47), meaning with power. And in yet another: *hearts and strengthened them (*ayyadahum*) with a spirit from Him* (58:22). And you can say to someone: 'I have a white hand.' This means you have a blessing."

(10) In *al-Tawḥīd*, a lengthy sermon is narrated from Abū al-Ḥasan al-Riḍā, in which he says:

Through His endowment of the sense organs with sense, it is known that He has no sense organ; through His giving substance to substances, it is known that He has no substance; through His creating opposition between things, it is known that He has no opposite; through His likening of things to one another, it is known He has no likeness. He opposed light with darkness, dryness with moisture, roughness with softness, coolness with heat. He unites their opposites and splits apart their similarities, whose very splitting apart points to the One who splits them, and whose very union points to the One who unites them. That is His saying: *In all things We have created pairs so that you may take admonition* (51:49). So he separated "before" and "after" that it might know there is nothing before or after Him. They bear witness by their natures that there is no nature for the One who endowed them with it. They inform us by their temporality that there is no time for the one who gave them it. They are veiled from one another that it might be known that there is no veil between Him and His creation.

(11) In *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān*, about the verse *So flee toward God*: It is said, narrated from al-Ṣādiq:

This means to make the *Ḥajj* pilgrimage.

Author's comments: It is also narrated in *al-Kāfī* and *al-Maᶜānī* from Abū al-Jārūd from Abū Jaᶜfar, and perhaps it is meant as an application of the verse to a particular situation (*taṭbīq*).

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Verses 52–60

This is the conclusion of the sūrah, and it brings the discourse full-circle, as it returns to what was being discussed at its outset, namely the Meccan polytheists' denial of the promised resurrection and the different things they impute about messengership, before warning them of the Promised Day.

كَذَٰلِكَ مَا أَتَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلَّا قَالُوا سَاحِرٌ أَوْ مَجْنُونٌ ﴿٥٢﴾

(51:52) ***So it was that there did not come to those who were before them any Messenger but they said, "A magician," or "A crazy man!"***

So it was (kadhālik) means this summarizes what has been said before about their denials, and the different opinions they would give.

…there did not come to those who were before explains the similarity between the polytheists of Mecca and the peoples who were destroyed before them.

أَتَوَاصَوْا بِهِ ۚ بَلْ هُمْ قَوْمٌ طَاغُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾

(51:53) ***Did they enjoin this upon one another*** **(tawāṣaw bihi)*?! Rather they were a rebellious lot.***

Tawāsī means for a group of people to enjoin one another to a matter, and *this* refers to what they would say about the messengers. This is a rhetorical question expressing amazement. In other words: "Did these peoples enjoin one another—did the earlier ones enjoin the latter ones—to say such things? No, rather they are a rebellious lot who were motivated to say this by their rebelliousness."

فَتَوَلَّ عَنْهُمْ فَمَا أَنْتَ بِمَلُومٍ ﴿٥٤﴾

(51:54) ***So turn away from them, for you will not be blameworthy.***

This verse draws a conclusion (with *so…*) based on their rebelliousness, arrogance and obstinate rejection. It means to say: "If this is the

situation and their only response to your preaching is to accuse you of being a magician or a madman, and your efforts do nothing except to increase their stubbornness, then turn away from them and do not argue with them about the truth. No one will blame you for that as you have shown them every proof."

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وَذَكِّرْ فَإِنَّ الذِّكْرَىٰ تَنفَعُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٥٥﴾

(51:55) ***And admonish, for admonition indeed benefits the faithful.***

After commanding the Prophet to turn away from the polytheists and avoid arguing with them, God commands him to admonish. This means: "Keep reminding and admonishing as you did before, for admonition benefits the faithful, unlike disputation and debate with those rebellious ones, which does not benefit them in the slightest and only increases their disbelief."

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ ﴿٥٦﴾

(51:56) ***I did not create the jinn and the humans except that they may worship Me*** **(li yaʿbudūni).**

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This verse is a transition (*iltifāt*) from dialogue to monologue. The aforementioned actions that are attributed to God—such as creation, appointing messengers and sending down punishment—all can be achieved through intermediaries such as the angels and other forms of cause and effect. This is unlike the original purpose (*gharaḍ*) of creation, for this is something that belongs only to God, and nobody shares in this with Him.

…except that they may worship Me is an exception of a negation (*istithnā min al-nafī*) which makes clear beyond all doubt that the act of creation has a purpose and that purpose is worship. This means that the goal of creation is for *them* to be worshippers, not for *God* to be worshipped, as God said: *except that they may worship Me*. He did not say: "except that I might be worshipped by them." This is because any goal, whatever it may be, is something that necessarily completes its possessor and addresses some need he has. However, God is without deficiency or need such that something else could complete Him or address this need.

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From another perspective, an action which does not help its doer in reaching some goal is pointless (*laghw*) and foolish. From this we deduce

that in His action, God has a purpose which is Himself—there is no goal beyond Him—and that this action has a purpose which returns to the action itself. This is a perfection (*kamāl*) that belongs to the act, not to its doer.[1] In short, worship (*ʿibādah*) is the purpose of the human being's creation, and the perfection that results from it is worship itself and its beneficial effects such as mercy, forgiveness and so on. And if worship had a purpose such as the knowledge (*maʿrifah*) and dedication to God that results from it, then this would be the ultimate goal, and worship would be the intermediate goal for that higher goal.

Poser: The *lām* in *li yaʿbudūni* signifies a purpose, this goes against the verse: *but they continue to differ, except those on whom your Lord has mercy—and for this He created them* (11:118–119), and the verse: *Certainly We have created for hell many of the jinn and humans* (7:179). The apparent meaning of the first verse is that the purpose of the creative act was disagreement (*ikhtilāf*), while the second verse suggests that the purpose was to send many of the jinn and humans to hell. This means we cannot say with certainly that this *lām* signifies the purpose (*gharaḍ*) for creation but rather it merely signifies its goal (*ghāyah*).

Reply: As for the first verse, this actually says they were created for mercy (*raḥmah*) rather than disagreement. As for the second verse, the *lām* in it is also to signify the purpose of their creation, but this is a *secondary* purpose (*gharaḍ tabaʿī*) rather than their primary purpose. And we discussed this at length earlier in this commentary when we dealt with these verses.[2]

Poser: If the *lām* in *li yaʿbudūni* were to signify a purpose, then this makes worship (*ʿibādah*) the purpose that God desired to achieve through the creative act. Now it is impossible that God's design should be thwarted and yet we see clearly that many men and jinn do not worship Him. This is the best indication that the *lām* in the verse is not supposed to signify a purpose; rather, "worship" means a cosmic worship (*ʿibādah takwīniyyah*)—namely, they worship Him through their existence—as when God says: *There is not a thing but celebrates His praise* (17:44).

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1 This means that God created the human being to reward him, and this reward devolves to the human being who benefits from it—God has no need of it. As for God's purpose in all this, it is His own exalted Essence; He only created because He is God. [From the author]

2 See Eng. vol. 16 under verse 7:179. [Pub.]

Alternatively, it could be said that this verse means He created them in a form that was suitable to worship Him by giving them free-will, intellect and capacity. Here this potentiality is spoken of as an actuality (*fiʿliyyah*) in a common figure of speech—just as one might say that "oxen were made to plough" or "houses were made to live in" even though not every ox ploughs a field and not every house has an inhabitant.

Reply: This problematic [interpretation] assumes that the definite article in *the jinn and the humans* is used to refer to every single member of the species (*istighrāq*), in which case if some individuals fail to fulfil their purpose, the entire design is thwarted. However, it appears that the definite article here is used to refer to the species (*jins*) in general rather than all of its members, in which case the purpose of worshipped is fulfilled even if some but not all members of the species perform it, and this is not affected by those individuals who do not. Yes, if not one member of the species worships God then His design has been thwarted, but as long as at least one member of the species is worshipping Him, this purpose is still fulfilled. And God has a purpose for the species just as He has a purpose for each individual person.

As for the interpretation which says *worship* here refers to the cosmic variety, the fact is that all created things perform this function, and there are no grounds for restricting it to *the jinn and the humans* as this verse does. This is in addition to the fact that this verse is intended to rebuke the faithless for abandoning the worship that God has enjoined upon them and to threaten them for denying the Resurrection, Judgement and Recompense, which is itself connected to volitional worship (*ʿibādah tashrīʿiyyah*) rather than cosmic worship (*ʿibādah takwīniyyah*).

The other interpretation says that *worship* refers to the capacity to worship. This means that the goal of creation is for the jinn and humans to have the ability to worship God or to be worthy recipients of God's religious ordinances. However, this is weakened by the fact that one only seeks the capacity to do something in order that this capacity be realized in practice. So if the goal of creating the jinn and the humans was that they might have the capacity to worship or to receive God's religious commands and prohibitions, then the primary goal is for them to worship in actuality, and the capacity for them to worship is only a goal insofar as it serves as a preliminary to achieving this. In other words, saying that *worship* means the capacity to worship is tantamount to acknowledging that the original and essential purpose of creation is worship in actuality. This

means that if there exists a valid objection to the jinn and humans being created for actual worship, this interpretation does not help us to avoid it.

So the correct understanding is that the definite article in *the jinn and the humans* means the species as a whole rather than its individual members (*al-jins dūn al-istighrāq*), and the meaning of *worship* is worship itself rather than the capacity to worship. And even if the latter was meant, then their worship *in potentia* is only an intermediary goal, with the utmost goal being their worship *in actualitas*. And worship *in actualitas,* meaning the actions God's servant performs with his limbs, such as standing, bowing and prostrating in prayer, is itself an intermediary goal for another, namely approaching God's Presence in the utter humility of servitude and poverty of bondage as opposed to His absolute might and needlessness, as we might glean from the verse: *Say, "What store my Lord would set by you were it not for your supplication?*" (25:77), where "worship" is substituted with "supplication."

The essence of worship is that the servant places himself in a position of abasement and servitude, and turns his countenance toward the station of his Lord. This is what they mean when they say that "worship" (*ʿibādah*) means "knowledge" (*maʿrifah*); it means the knowledge that comes from worship.

So the essence of worship is the highest goal of the creative act—that the servant should turn away from everything else, even from his own self, and remember his Lord.

This is what pondering on the words *I did not create the jinn and the humans except that they may worship Me* suggests. Perhaps the jinn are mentioned before the humans because they were created before them, as God says in the verse: *and We created the jinn earlier out of a piercing fire* (15:27). And worship is the purpose of the act, meaning it brings perfection to the act rather than its doer, as we have already said.

From the use of clauses of negation and exception in this verse, we can also deduce that God shows no special concern (*ʿināyah*) for those who do not worship Him, as the verse says: *Say, "What store my Lord would set by you were it not for your supplication?"* (25:77)

مَا أُرِيدُ مِنْهُمْ مِنْ رِزْقٍ وَمَا أُرِيدُ أَنْ يُطْعِمُونِ ﴿٥٧﴾

(51:57) ***I desire no provision from them, nor do I desire that they should feed Me.***

To feed (iṭʿām) means to provide someone with food to eat, as God says in other verses: *…and provides me with food and drink* (26:79) and *who has fed them from hunger* (106:4).

Here, feeding is mentioned after "provision" (*rizq*) as mentioning something specific after something general, indicating a special concern for this kind of provision. This is because food is one of the most common needs of humans and other creatures and the most base, as it is preceded by hunger and accompanied by excretion.

It is said that *provision* means "provision for My servants" so that the verse means: "I do not desire that they provide for my servants whom I provide for, nor do I want them to feed Me."

It is also said that the meaning of *feed* is to offer food to Him in the same manner as a slave offers food to his master or a servant to his employer, in which case the meaning of *provision* is to obtain the provision itself, while *feed* means to offer what they have obtained. This renders the verse: "I do not desire any provision that they have obtained, nor do I desire that they should offer me anything to eat."

إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الرَّزَّاقُ ذُو الْقُوَّةِ الْمَتِينُ ﴿٥٨﴾

(51:58) *Indeed it is God who is the All-provider* (razzāq), *Powerful* (dhū al-quwwah), *All-strong* (matīn).

This explains the reason why *I desire no provision from them…* and the transition in this verse from the first-person ("I") to the third-person ("He") is to link this explanation to the Majestic Name (*Allāh*) from which all things begin and to which all things return. It is as if to say: "I do not desire any provision from them because it is I who provides for all as I am *Allāh*!"

The name *razzāq*—which is a noun of magnification (*ism al-mubālaghah*)—is used to show that even if God is the sole provider (*rāziq*), because of the countless beings whom He provides for, He is the *razzāq* ("the All-provider"). So this verse is similar to one which we have encountered already: *and I am not tyrannical* (ẓullām*) to the servants* (50:29), where *ẓullām* appears as a noun of magnification to signify abundance.

Dhū al-quwwah is one of God's names with the meaning of *al-qawiyy*, but this is more forceful than *al-qawiyy*, and *matīn* is another of his names with the same meaning as *al-qawiyy*. These three names appear together

to indicate that God alone controls provision and that there is nothing that can prevent His provision from reaching its recipients, no matter how many they might be.

فَإِنَّ لِلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا ذَنُوبًا مِثْلَ ذَنُوبِ أَصْحَابِهِمْ فَلَا يَسْتَعْجِلُونِ ﴿٥٩﴾

(51:59) ***So indeed the lot*** **(dhanūb)** ***of those who do wrong will be like the lot of their counterparts. So let them not hasten Me.***

Dhanūb means a portion (*naṣīb*), and *to hasten* means to goad someone into acting with haste, and the *fa* ("so") at the beginning of the verse signifies that it follows logically from the above verse *I did not create the jinn and the humans except that they may worship Me.*

With this in mind, the verse means: So if these wrongdoers do not worship God then He will have no concern for them, nor will any felicity from Him encompass them, for they have a share of punishment like that of their counterparts from previous nations that were destroyed. So let them not demand that I hasten their punishment or ask: "When will this promise be if you are truthful?" or "When will be the Day of Recompense?"

This verse transitions from speaking in the third-person to speaking in the first-person. This shifts the tone from that of the verse *Indeed it is God who is the All-provider…* back to that of the verses before it, beginning with: *I did not create the jinn and the humans…* is to show that this verse is drawing a conclusion from them.

فَوَيْلٌ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ يَوْمِهِمُ الَّذِي يُوعَدُونَ ﴿٦٠﴾

(51:60) ***So woe to the faithless for the day they are promised!***

The *fa* at the beginning of this verse indicates that it follows logically from the previous one (*So indeed the lot of those who do wrong…*) and calls attention to the fact that they will receive their share on the Day of Resurrection, even if He might grant them a share of it beforehand, as it is a day which contains only woe and destruction for them. It is their promised day.

And by substituting the phrase *those who do wrong* (al-ladhīna ẓalamū) with *the faithless* (al-ladhīna kafarū), the verse shows that the wrongdoing (*ẓulm*) of the former is none other than faithlessness (*kufr*).

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān*, it is narrated from Mujāhid that ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib came out wearing a turban and wrapped in a shirt and said about the verse *So turn away from them, for you will not be blameworthy* (51:54):
When the Prophet was told: *So turn away from them*…, there was not one of us save that he was certain that he would be destroyed. But then the verse was revealed: *And admonish, for admonition indeed benefits the faithful* (51:55), and we were relieved because it meant: "Admonish those of your people who believe, for admonition benefits them." This is narrated from al-Kalbī.

Author's comments: This narration is also found in *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, and words to this effect are narrated by Ibn Rāhuwayh and Ibn Mardawayh from him.

(2) In *al-Tawḥīd* it is narrated from Ibn Abī ᶜUmayr:
I asked Abū al-Ḥasan Mūsā b. Jaᶜfar [Imām al-Kāẓim]: "What is the meaning of the saying of God's Messenger: 'Strive, for the purpose of everything comes easily to it'?"
He told me: "God created the jinn and humans to worship Him; He did not create them to disobey Him. That is the meaning of the verse: *I did not create the jinn and the humans except that they may worship Me* (51:56). So the purpose of each thing comes easily to it. So woe to those who prefer blindness to guidance!"

(3) In *ᶜIlal* it is narrated from Abū ᶜAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq]:
Ḥusayn b. ᶜAlī came out to his companions and said: "God only created the servants to know Him, and when they knew Him they would worship Him, and when they worshipped Him, this would free them from worshipping anything else."

(4) And in the same source from Abū Baṣīr:
I asked Abū ᶜAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq] about the verse: *I did not create the jinn and the humans except that they may worship Me*, and he said: "He created them to enjoin worship upon them."

Author's comments: A similar narration is narrated in *Tafsīr al-Qummī* implicitly and with an incomplete chain. And what we have said previously about this verse elucidates the meaning of these narrations, namely that there is a series of purposes to creation: moral duty (*taklīf*), worship (*ᶜibādah*), and knowledge (*maᶜrifah*).

(5) In *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, it is narrated from Yaʿqūb b. Saʿīd:
I asked Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq] about the meaning of the verse *I did not create the jinn and the humans except that they may worship Me.*
He told me: "He created them for worship."
Then I asked him about the verse: *but they continue to differ, except those on whom your Lord has mercy—and that is why He created them* (11:118–119).
He told me: "This came down after that."

Author's comments: This means *But they continue to differ* came after *I did not create*. By this he intends that the former has abrogated the latter. In *Tafsīr al-Qummī* we read in another narration that this verse is abrogated by *But they continue to differ*. However, the meaning of abrogation (*naskh*) here is that of clarification (*naskh al-bayān*) and the removal of ambiguity, not *naskh* in the technical legal sense. And this sense of *naskh* frequently appears in their speech, as we have already alluded to in our discussion of *For any verse that We abrogate or remove from their memories…* (2:106).

And this means that the ultimate goal of creation is the special kind of divine mercy that is realised through worship, and that is the unique felicity of knowledge of the divine.

(6) And in *Tahdhīb* it is narrated from Sudayr:
I asked Abū ʿAbd Allāh: "What must a man do when seeking provision?"
He said: "If you have opened your door and opened your palm, then you have done as you must."

The end. All praise be to Almighty God.

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